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LAUGHING EYES:

A TALE OF

THE NATCHEZ FORT.

BY HENRY J. THOMAS,

AUTHOR OF "THE WRONG MAN," "THE ALLENS," ETC.

NEW YORK:
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LAUGHING EYES.

CHAPTER I.

THE CASKET GIRL.

A YOUNG girl, with dimpled cheeks and laughing eyes, sat on the door-step of the comfortable log dwelling which was occupied by two of the Ursulines within the confines of the Natchez fort. The sun was going down, and she liked the breath of the breeze blowing through her hair better than the close air within, where the most nun-like neatness and primness reigned. There was nothing prim about the girl. Although she was very busy with a piece of embroidery which she had in her hands, and there was nothing at all about her to awaken merriment, the natural buoyancy of her spirits bubbled over continually in smiles and piquant gestures. Occasionally, she would pause to admire the progress of her work, or to throw a flashing glance in the face of the setting sun. Her name was Marguerite Cantarelle, and her history up to this seventeenth year of her life may be briefly told.

She was one of the "casket girls" who had been sent over by the French Government to aid in supplying their Louisiana colonies with the much-needed article of wives. The ship which had brought this precious freight had landed three months before, and all of its cargo was already wedded and well disposed of except Marguerite, the belle of the "assortment." Her brilliant face and pretty manners had bought her an offer from every unprovided man in the vicinity of the fort, but she had steadily resisted all, begging the Ursulines to keep her with them until she found the object of her journey across the sea.

When it had become known among the grisettes of Paris that the Government proposed to send a company from their ranks to the adventurers across the sea, who were reported to be living in a land of milk and honey, where gold and silver

grew on trees, there were many who offered themselves, eager to try these novel fortunes. Alas, for those gay young creatures! The fate which they afterward, many of them, met, was far different from the brilliant and romantic life which they had anticipated. Among those who thus solicited a passage to the New World was Marguerite Cantarelle. She was not as poor as the other girls, having a chest of good clothing, many little trinkets, and some money of her own; moreover, she was so skillful with her needle as to have the means of gaining her own living in the city where she had been born. But she had a purpose in emigrating which made her very anxious to be one of the accepted. Two years before, when she was but fifteen, her second cousin, Maurice Cantarelle, a young man of good education but small fortune, had been beguiled by the stories of enormous wealth to be rapidly gained in the province in which the merchant prince, Crozat, was risking his great fortunes, and had gone off as secretary, or something of the kind, to one of the leading men of the colony. On the eve of his departure he had told her how much he loved her, and that, as soon as she was old enough, and he had a home provided for her, he was coming back to marry her. It nearly broke her heart to let him go, for she adored him with all the passionate ardor of her French nature; but she was naturally gay and hopeful—she was young, and could not be forever sad; so that, after a time, she regained her joyousness, though she did not cease to love her cousin. In two years she received but one message from him, which was to the effect to be faithful to him, for he should certainly return to claim her, as soon as the country in which he was should become more settled, and less in perpetual alarm from the red-men. In the mean time, the grandmother with whom she lived died, leaving her almost destitute of friends and relations. Then it was that, hearing of the intention of the company to export respectable wives to the far colony, she secured a free passage on the ship which conveyed these girls to their destination. She was resolved to go to Maurice, and thus save him the trouble of coming to her. Through all the long and wearisome voyage her cheek would flush and her heart thrill with the thought of the glad surprise in store for her lover. She had

ascertained that it was probable that he was at Natchez, the very settlement at which it was proposed to land the delectable invoice of bright eyes and rosy cheeks, so that her anticipations were of the happiest character. She was the envy of all her companions on account of her superior beauty, education and manners, and the fact of her having a nice little wedding outfit in her "casket," which was a good-sized chest. But however much they envied her, they could not withhold their love, she was so kind and unassuming; and so artless and bewitching in her manners, that men and women were equally charmed.

When the ship arrived in port, Marguerite was destined to a heavy disappointment. Maurice was not at the fort, but was away with his employer on a long and dangerous expedition into the interior, near Natchitoches, where the French were disputing with the Spaniards for a settlement. But her spirits were too elastic, her courage too great, to give way long to depression; she rallied her hopes to await his return, and in the mean time remained under the protection of the good sisters, who soon grew to feel that she was like a ray of sunshine in their cold and formal abodes. Suitors enough to have turned her pretty head, had it not been steadied by a real and solemn love, sued for her hand, some of them, in despair, seeking the influence of the Ursulines to compel her to yield to their wishes. These were too glad of her presence in their household to be anxious to get rid of her; they knew that she was betrothed, and was awaiting the return of her lover, and they admired her purity of heart and constancy too sincerely to wish to influence her to accept any of the offers made to her. So she plied her needle in their service, and waited for Maurice.

"I am going to put this on Sister Marie's table, and see if she doesn't pick it up and smell of it," said Marguerite, as she sat on the door-step, looking with admiration at the rose she was embroidering, which was indeed almost life-like enough to tempt a careless observer to think it had perfume as well as color. "It will please me to see how provoked she will be at the mistake. She is so correct, she thinks herself right in every thing. Ah, me! I could never be an Ursuline! I am not good enough."

Half laughing, half sighing, she lifted her head, with a backward toss of the drooping curls, to meet a pair of eyes fixed on her with such fiery intensity as to fairly startle the color out of her cheeks. A few feet from her stood an Indian, whose silent footstep she had not heard approaching. She knew him, by his dress and features, to be a member of the powerful Natchez tribe, after whom the fort was named, whose villages lay close at hand, and who were, at present, on friendly terms with the colony, and constant visitors at the fort. They were a majestic, noble-looking race, famed for their fine proportions and great strength, and this was one of the handsomest of their young braves. Over six feet in height, straight as one of his own arrows, with regular features, and a complexion swarthy and rich, as he stood there in his gorgeous and fantastic dress, he made an impression on the maiden which would have been pleasing had it not been for the look in his black eyes from which she shrunk. They absolutely blazed with intense delight and passion. It took but an instant for the wild soul of the savage to leap into the fullness of love. Arrested, while passing on an errand to Clopart, the commander of the fort, by the fair vision of the young French girl, he had not gazed a moment on her sweet and animated face before his desire was fixed forever. Her eyes sunk beneath his overpowering glance.

"How do you do?" he said, presently, in tolerable French—the Natchez were a courtly nation, and never intermitted the formalities.

"I am very well, thank you. I hope the Great Sun shines as bright as ever," responded Marguerite, mischievously.

The prince and hereditary ruler of the tribe was called the Great Sun, and she inquired after his welfare as a piece of politeness to this noble of his family.

"His brightness is unclouded," said the Indian, watching the half-repressed smiles which rippled about her mouth with ardent admiration; then, drawing nearer, he pointed to the piece of velvet she was embroidering: "If the Little Sun brings a dressed deer-skin, will you make him a pair of moccasins with flowers like these? There are none of the women of the Natchez who can do it. He will pay you freely in fowls, corn, or in soft furs for a winter mantle."

She was embarrassed, not by the request, which she was willing enough to comply with, but with the voice and manner of the young chief of whom she had made such a sudden conquest.

"I can not promise for myself," she said; "you must ask Sister Marie. If she permits me to do it, whatever you are pleased to give will belong to her."

He strode past her into the dwelling, where he seated himself, and remained for some moments in silence. Sister Marie, who knew the ways of his tribe, refrained from addressing him, until after his communication was made. At length he said, with a gravity equal to a more important occasion :

"The flowers spring from the fingers of Laughing Eyes. None of the Natchez maidens can make them grow so fair. I would like her to sprinkle them over my moccasins, so that I will walk in roses when I go out on my long journeys. The good mother shall have a barrel of corn and a wild turkey."

The nun was of too thrifty a habit to reject this munificent compensation; and not suspecting the feelings of the savage, she saw in it only a chance to turn to good account the taste and industry of her *protégé*, and she replied :

"Laughing Eyes shall embroider the moccasins of the Little Sun."

"He will bring the deer-skin to-morrow, very soft and nicely dressed;" so saying, the Indian withdrew without even another glance at the maiden, continuing on his way to the residence of the commander.

"I have got a new name, Sister Marie," cried Marguerite, when he was out of hearing; "isn't it a pretty one? I'm quite flattered. If I had a mirror, I'd consult it immediately, to see if the name is a fitting one. Do my eyes really laugh, do you think?" and she raised them, dark-blue and flashing with mirth, to the faded ones of the nun.

"Don't think I'm going to play Indian, and compliment you, Marguerite. You are vain and silly enough, already. Your head is as giddy as the robin's on a swinging tree-top. The world has got a strong hold upon your heart; you'll have to fight it desperately, with all manner of earnest

prayers, or it will get the entire possession, to the exclusion of the Christian graces."

"I know it," answered the maiden, penitently, trying to look demure. "I love the things of this world very much, especially my cousin Maurice, and my good Sister Marie, though *she* is not much of this world. It's so hard to be good when one is young and full of spirits. Try as hard as I can, I can't help being full of fun and idle thought. Ah, I am afraid I shall never have the grace to emulate you."

She said this so sincerely that the grave nun gave her a patronizing smile; wedded as she was to her holy calling, she was not so strong as to be armor-proof to the shafts of admiration; it was pleasant to feel how much the girl respected and stood in awe of her.

"I hope you will love me, with all my faults," continued Marguerite; "but I'm sorry that Indian is coming here again. I wish you had refused to have me embroider his shoes. I didn't like his looks."

"I thought him one of the finest of his tribe. He is a member of the royal family—a Little Sun—that is, a relative of the Great Sun. I did not wish to offend him, and we could not well afford to refuse the barrel of corn which he offered, in these times, when provisions are scarce."

"If that is so, I shall do the work willingly; but I am afraid of him."

"Nonsense! what is there to fear? I am sure he admired you very much."

Marguerite did not wish to say that *that* was the reason why she felt a dread of him, so she kept silent.

Early the next day the Indian presented himself at the door with the deer-skin for the moccasins. Again Marguerite shrunk when she met the glance of his black but glittering eyes; but she tried to shake off the feeling as a foolish one, and to make pleasant answers to his few remarks. He was really handsome, with an air of ease and dignity which few white men attain to, and seemed to have caught much of the civilization of the French, his costume being modeled after theirs, except that it was ornamented, in the highest style of Indian art, with bead embroidery and feathers.

After he had given her the deer-skin, he seated himself as

the day before, following her every motion. Sister Marie thought his actions governed by curiosity, and bade Marguerite begin her work, who found it impossible to draw the silken floss which she used through the leather, and who asked the brave if she might substitute cloth for the upper portions of his moccasins. When he had consented to this, she rapidly traced the outlines of a group of flowers on the piece of cloth and began her embroidery.

"Laughing Eyes sews with the rays of the sun," said the chieftain, taking in his hands one of the glistening threads of yellow silk, "with starlight, and with bark which she strips off of the rainbow. It is no wonder that her sewing is so beautiful. If I had a wife who could sew like that, she should never hoe corn nor carry burdens on her back. She should sit all day and adorn my garments."

There was so much meaning in his tone that Marguerite could not keep back the blushes from her cheeks; but she looked him bravely in the face, as she said:

"Bring a maiden of your tribe to me, and I will instruct her in the art, so that she will be able to do this as well as I."

"Their fingers are not small enough, and they are too hard with toil," was the reply. "Laughing Eyes has fingers like lilies in the water."

For two or three hours he continued his visit; the next day he came again, saying little, but watching every stitch set by those flying fingers. Marguerite worked swiftly at her task, when she found that it was to be so vigilantly observed, continuing her employment until late in the night, so that she might complete it by the end of the third day. She was so nervous when the Indian sat there watching her, that she could not get along as rapidly as usual. When he came again the third day she thought she would try a little sarcasm.

"Do you come here to learn embroidery?" she asked. "I thought that the mighty Natchez warriors had something greater to do than to sit and learn how to thread needles of women."

"There is a time for all things," responded the brave, almost in the words of the wise man of old; "a time to hunt and a time to take the war-path; a time to work and a time

to be idle ; a time to scalp our enemies, a time to feast on corn and a time to feast on fish, and a time to woo our wives. Have I not said truly ?”

“ You speak well,” rejoined the maiden, and for the life of her she could not repress the arch smile and look which she gave her visitor.

She did not feel such a dread of him as at first ; his manner was softer and less intense ; though not meaning the least in the world to coquet with him, she felt a mischievous triumph in her conquest. She did not fear, because she did not know, the dangerous passions of the savage nature, resistless alike in hate or love. She knew that the young brave admired her ; but she did not really think that he would have the presumption to solicit her hand. As he met that piquant look, the fire in the Indian’s eye softened into a liquid splendor which poured itself into her own, until her lashes drooped, and to cast off the feeling which overpowered her, she began to hum a gay little song, and to affect to be very much engaged with her work. If she had seen the changing expression of his face, she would hardly have dared to continue ; but she never looked off her embroidery. Her voice was sweet, and the Natchez, who had never heard any music but the dreary, monotonous drumming and rattling of his national war music, listened, like one who sees heaven open and catches the sound of its melodies. Rapture lighted up his swarthy features till they glowed, while according to the sentiment of the song his emotions varied. When she caroled a lively measure, he laughed and kept time with his hands and feet ; when she hummed a tender love song he remained absorbed in silent ecstasy.

“ You have swallowed a thousand birds, feathers and all,” said he, when she stopped singing, and told him the moccasins were finished.

“ Dear me, what an idea,” said Marguerite. “ Do you hear what he says, Sister Marie ? Here are his shoes. Shall I give them to him ?”

“ Not until he brings the corn,” was the prudent answer.

“ Come to-morrow and you shall have them,” continued the girl, to her visitor.

“ It is well,” he replied, but still he remained in his seat.

Every word and gesture of the beautiful French girl deepened his fascination. She was so utterly different from the submissive, homely, despised women of his own race, that his mind as well as his senses were enthralled. Being a person of fine natural gifts and considerable intelligence, he was charmed with her spirit and wit, and the constant play of expression over her animated face. Men of more cultivation than Rattlesnake would have been delighted with the same, though to him these graces had the added power of novelty.

Seeing him remain after the moccasins were completed, it just began to creep into the nun's comprehension that it was not his anxiety about these which alone had detained him. The childish love of ornament possessed by the Indian braves had accounted to her for his interest in the progress of the embroidery, and it was not until now that she perceived any other motive. Then she began to feel uneasy. Marriage between white women and Indian men was almost unknown, although Indian wives were plenty in the French colony, and it had not entered into the good Ursuline's head, until this hour, that the haughty young chief had aspired to so great an honor. Now she began to observe him more closely, and was not long in making up her mind that he must be discountenanced. She sent Marguerite off to one of the neighbors on an errand, and, during her absence, hinted that it was getting too late in the afternoon for them to longer entertain company. Rattlesnake took the hint, withdrawing in majestic silence.

The next day three Natchez women, belonging to the plebeians, or lower class, appeared at the Ursuline dwelling with a sack of corn each, which he had employed them to deliver in payment for the moccasins; and shortly after, another woman, old, and of higher rank—one of the female Suns—presented herself, entering the house and sitting down in dignified silence. Sister Marie and Marguerite, who were both of them sewing, waited for her to make her errand known; the former had already guessed it, and therefore was not much surprised when their visitor, having remained silent as long as she thought becoming, rose and said:

“My son has sent me for the moccasins; the corn which

he promised has been delivered, and the first time that he goes deep into the forest after game, when he shall take the head off the wild turkey with his arrows, he will bring it, as he said. My son, Rattlesnake, is a handsome youth and a bold warrior. He could have any of the maidens of his tribe whom he should solicit. But he has been wounded with the bright rays which come from the Laughing Eyes, and nothing will heal the wound, unless the Laughing Eyes consent to abide in his dwelling. His mother has come to bring her this token of his regard, and to take back to her son the French girl's answer."

So saying, she laid three Spanish dollars and a bundle of gorgeous feathers and porcupine quills upon the table beside which she stood.

Sister Marie had no need to look in the maiden's face to see how unexpected and distasteful was this proposition; she knew that her heart was pledged to a lover of her own nation, and, if it were not, that Marguerite had a very great aversion to the Indians, in any other view than as wild creatures. She herself was extremely opposed to the mingling of bloods, which she would have prevented, had it been in her power; but she knew the sensitive and jealous character of the red people, and was anxious to conciliate them. She warned her *protégé*, by a look, not to betray either contempt or merri-ment. After a sufficient time for apparent reflection, she rose, also, and replied:

"Your son, as you say, is a bold warrior and a handsome youth. We have never beheld a noble of your tribe whom we admired so much. We are very sorry that he has been wounded by Laughing Eyes; but we hope and believe that time will heal the wound; for Laughing Eyes, long before she crossed the big salt lake, was promised to a young brave of her own nation. She loves him, and him only, and she waits for him here, until he returns from Natchitoches, whither he has gone with St. Denis. For his sake she has refused as many lovers as there are feathers in that bundle. Besides, the ways of the French are not like those of the Natchez. Your son would be better content with a wife from his own people. If he thinks of it twice, he will agree with me that a Natchez maiden would be a more suitable companion.

Return him his munificent present, with our grateful thanks for the honor he has done us."

Receiving this reply, the Indian woman bowed her head in disappointment, took up the feathers and money, and moved silently from the house; but in two hours she had returned, and deposited twice the amount of the first present on the table, while she again addressed the nun:

"I know not if ever before a female Sun condescended twice to sue for a wife for her son. It is bitter as salt water to my pride to do it, but my son has asked it, and he is so afflicted, that I can refuse him nothing. He bids me say that he will make himself a Frenchman for the sake of Laughing Eyes. She shall have a house, like the French houses, to abide in; she shall not hoe corn, nor carry water nor burdens, but do nothing from morning till night but beautify his garments with her excellent sewing. His heart is set upon her, for his wife, as immovably as a rock is set in the earth. I hope that the soft heart of the maiden will yield to his entreaty, for he is much troubled."

"What do you say, Marguerite?" asked the Ursuline, turning to her.

"Tell your son, the great and honored chief, Rattlesnake, to judge my actions by his own feelings. Even as you say his heart is fixed, has mine been set upon another for many years. The man whom I will have for my husband is my cousin. One grandmother brought us up. I should be light and trifling did I forsake him for another. I should not make a good wife, were I capable of this thing. Besides, I am a Frenchwoman, and could never become a Natchez. My heart is with my own people. Ask me no more."

"You speak truth," murmured the old woman, taking up her gifts again. "I will tell my son that your words are discreet, and that he must look elsewhere."

"Isn't it funny?" cried Marguerite, when the ambassador had departed. "I shall have such amusement telling Maurice about my Indian conquest. He was a splendid-looking person, for an Indian, but, ah—bah!" and she laughed and shuddered at the same moment.

"You're a giddy child," said the Ursuline, reprovingly. "If I had guessed his object I would not have allowed you

to work his moccasins. I would rather he would not have taken such a fancy into his head. The more I see of these Indians, the more dread I have of arousing their passions in any manner. God grant nothing serious comes of it! Beauty is the devil's gift, Marguerite—it is bad to have it. I wish you had less of it,”—and with a half-sigh, half-smile, she glanced at the bright young face.

“I don't second that wish,” thought Marguerite, “and I guess Maurice doesn't,”—and she fell to wondering when she should ever see him.

CHAPTER II.

THE MOON OF NEW CORN.

MARGUERITE saw no more of her Indian suitor for three or four weeks, except that on several occasions he had stopped in the street opposite the door and gazed at her for some time, when she sat, sewing, in the door or window. If she had not thus been reminded of him she would have forgotten him easily for her thoughts were engrossed in pleasant anticipations of the return of Maurice. She had heard from the officer in command of the fort, that the expedition to which he had attached himself was expected home in the fall, and August was already slipping away. In looking over the contents of her chest, making her dresses, trimming her clothes, and working herself a white muslin for a wedding-robe, she passed the time. But now she had to find herself a new home; or rather a new family came into the house which the Ursuline had occupied, who returned to New Orleans to fulfill her promised and her duty as a hospital nurse. The people who came into the dwelling were a respectable merchant and his wife, who guaranteed to take good care of the maiden till her betrothed should take her off their hands.

The people within Fort Rosalie and surrounding it, within reach of its walls, were not entirely denied the pleasures of social life, of which even new settlements contrive to have a

fair portion. The privations they were compelled to encounter deepened their appreciation of the few comforts they possessed, while the sense of danger from which they were never free added a keener zest to their enjoyments. During the preceding winter more than one merry dancing-party had been improvised; and as the heats of that southern summer forbade such lively exercise, there was boating by moonlight, out-of-door gatherings for gossip and games, with an occasional excursion to the Indian villages to witness their feasts and ceremonies. A general feeling of security prevailed. The Natchez, whose villages surrounded the fort, the nearest over two miles distant, and who were the most powerful and intelligent of all the various tribes, were now exceedingly friendly, standing in wholesome awe of their white neighbors, for whom they expressed great admiration. Marguerite had heard so much of their customs and manners that she had a curiosity to see them in their own homes; and when, early in September, it was proposed by some of the young people to go out to the principal village of the Great Sun and witness the feasting on the occasion of the *Moon of New Corn*, she was eager to make one of the company.

On the morning of the first day of the ceremonies a gay party started forth on foot, from the fort, reaching the principal village, near which the barn for the reception of the sacred corn had been erected, in time to become spectators to the greater part of the observances. The corn which was used on this great occasion had been previously planted and reaped, by certain warriors, in virgin soil, and deposited in the shed erected for the purpose, after which notice was given to the Great Sun that the corn was ready. The Great Sun was both the religious and civil head of the nation. When the pale-faces reached the ground whereupon the whole tribe was assembled, the king had already been conveyed on a sedan chair to his throne near the barn, the corn had been consecrated by various solemn and dismal howls, and was now undergoing the process of cooking. The visitors were made welcome and given places near the nobles who surrounded the Sun, among whom Marguerite instantly recognized Rattlesnake, whose eyes were fixed upon her whenever she glanced in that direction.

When the corn was cooked, two dishes were brought to the Great Sun, who presented them to the four quarters of the world, and sending one of them to the war-chief, commanded him to eat—his subjects eagerly following the example set. The warriors ate first, then the young men and boys, and lastly the women and young girls. On this occasion their guests were treated with illustrious courtesy, being served at the same time with the warriors; all of them partook of the sacred corn, which was really an excellent dish, the refusal to share which would have been taken as an affront.

When the warriors had done, they formed themselves into two sides of a square, fitted up for the occasion, and sung battle-songs, with alternate choruses, for half an hour. The war-chief put an end to the concert by striking with his tomahawk a red post in the midst of the square, called the warrior's post. Then began declamations from various warriors, beginning with that of their chief. With the eloquence of an Indian he recited his exploits, boasting of the number of foes he had slain. When he finished, he appealed to the bystanders to say if what he had asserted was not true, who answered in the affirmative with a prolonged howl.

Marguerite was deeply interested in these proceedings; yet it was a kind of interest such as the fascinated bird feels in the serpent which charms it. Inwardly she shuddered all the time. When the war-chief so vigorously asserted his deeds of prowess, brandishing his tomahawk, with flashing eyes and body painted in emblematic red, going over the bloody acts of which he boasted, a cold hand seemed to stretch out of the future and grasp her benumbed heart. She felt as if herself and the little party with her would be but feathers in the tempest, should the rage of these wild creatures break out on them—she wondered, when she saw the nation together in its power, that Clopart, the commander of the fort, could feel safe with so small a band of soldiery. Not even the few cannon which defended the citadel appeared to her sufficient for the risks.

As the speakers followed one another in rapid succession, she lost herself in a dream of terror; it seemed to her that they were threatening the little fort toward which some of their most violent gestures were made. Of course she did

not understand their language, which was translated to her by a white officer who sat by her side.

Among those who declaimed on the first day of the feast was Rattlesnake. He spoke with fierce and terrible energy, calling out the loud plaudits of the company. To Marguerite it seemed as if all his eloquence was directed to her; and indeed he was addressing himself to her alone—his whole wild soul was given to the endeavor to arouse her admiration—and there was much to excite admiration in the superb attitudes of the lithe and graceful figure and the innate power of his oratory. But the timid girl was only alarmed to see him in this new guise. Had she been an Indian maiden he certainly would have won the coveted prize of her love; for no woman of his race could have withstood his matchless and fiery eloquence.

There was one among the young girls of the Natchez present there into whose breast the eloquence of Rattlesnake melted like liquid light. She sat not far from the pale-faces whom she had been regarding with civil curiosity; but when the young warrior spoke, her attention was concentrated upon him; her black eyes flashed with delight and the dark blood glowed in her swarthy cheeks. Occasionally she glanced proudly around to notice if his efforts were appreciated by their visitors, whom she supposed him trying to impress; but gradually, with the instinct of jealousy, she perceived that one, the fairest and most youthful of the pale-faces, was the only person he really addressed. He heeded not even the acclamation with which the old men of the tribe greeted each fresh burst of oratory; his eyes were bent upon one countenance, even as the Indian girl's were bent upon him. When she became fully conscious of this, her expression changed from that of delight to melancholy, distress, and anger. As plainly as clouds sweep over the sky, the passions of the forest-maiden swept over her face; she was not trained, as were the men of her tribe, to hide her emotions; if any had been watching her they could hardly have failed to read the meaning of the burning glances which she cast from beneath a scowling brow, first at the speaker and again to the white girl.

Tree-la-lu, a Little Bird, had been enamored of Rattlesnake

for many months. Early in the summer she had placed herself in his way, for the purpose of attracting his affections; he had accepted and worn the bead-embroidered belt she had given him; and she had daily expected his mother to come to the hut of her parents to make an arrangement, when a change had suddenly come over her almost avowed lover. He had sent back her belt; his manner was moody and cold; she thought him either about to be attacked with sickness, or to go off on some important war expedition; but when she found that he was neither ill nor going away, she observed him vigilantly, to find if he had favored any other maiden of her village. Not the least sign of any such rival could she detect, except the splendid moccasins that he wore, and these she knew were probably purchased from the French. In alternate hope and despondency she had waited for the cloud to pass off the brightness of her idol, that his eyes might again warm her soul with their smiles. She expected, during the several days of dancing and feasting of the *Moon of New Corn*, to bring him to her feet; she had attired herself with the utmost coquetry of Indian fashion, a jingle of tiny bells around the bottom of her red-cloth skirt making her the envy of every other female present. These bells, which the emigrants had imported from France, were the most coveted of ornaments, and by their soft tinkle she had expected to subdue the cold heart of Rattlesnake. The emotions which now stormed in her wild bosom, when she heard his overpowering eloquence, and saw its force all directed toward the beautiful white girl, were painted on her face. Rage, despair, deep sorrow drifted in clouds over her countenance, broken by transient gleams of hope. The young brave did not observe her. Had he done so, it is probable that policy would have prompted him to make the object of his attentions less apparent, for his own nature would have taught him the wild character and suggestions of the passions he was arousing in this woman of his race. But his attention was riveted too strongly upon Marguerite, for him to think of the rest of his auditory; when he caught her eyes, he held them with his own—their fierce magnetism prevented her turning her glance away—she turned pale while she listened; and he, seeing how fixed she became under the influence of his

eloquence, redoubled its power, pouring forth a strain of self-glorification and aspiration, which brought down, at its close, a succession of deafening howls of approbation from his admiring companions. A glow of triumph lit up his swarthy face, at the acclamations; he had no doubt of the effect of these honors in moving the heart of Laughing Eyes. Returning to his place in the ring, to make way for the next speaker, he cast frequent glances at the group of pale-faces; but the eyes of the white maiden were now diverted to the present orator, and Rattlesnake failed to receive the smiles of encouragement which he had expected.

He did not approach the visitors until late in the afternoon, when he came with a couple of his inferiors, who bore the boiled corn which he offered for the refreshment of the guests. He, in person, gave Marguerite her share, and as he did so, said, in a low voice:

"You see that even our wisest men have faith in the bravery of Rattlesnake. His house has been lonely for the last moon—there is no music but the hooting of owls at night, and no brightness by day. Will the Laughing Eyes come? She shall be a princess, and the wife of a warrior."

This last sentence was spoken with great dignity, as if he apologized to himself for his want of self-respect in asking a woman twice; but he could not conceal the intense feeling in his voice and manner.

"I have no other reply than the one I made your mother. I am not free to accept your offer—I am already promised to another, as I said," answered the girl, firmly, looking him full in the eyes—for Marguerite, although young and thoughtless, had plenty of character, and she felt that it was time to put an end to this unpleasant affair, which she had not expected would be again revived.

This was all that passed between them at that time. As Marguerite turned away from the silent brave, an Indian girl pressed into her hand a little gift of shells strung for a necklace; and almost before she could smile her thanks, retreated, the bells upon her skirt chiming to her light and rapid motions. It was Tree-la-lu, who had sacrificed her favorite necklace to this artifice to get near her lover, and overhear what he should say to the pale-face. He had not

observed her, while she, breathless and silent, stood close at hand, listening to the proposal and rejection. When she met the glance of the brave, she gave the white girl the shells, as if to do that had brought her there; but the scornful look and muttered word of Rattlesnake revealed that he read her purpose, and that she had made him angry.

Marguerite, who felt very much disturbed by what the brave had said to her, now urged her companions to return to the fort before dark; but they had so little to vary the monotony of their lives at home that they voted to remain and witness the dancing by torch-light. At dusk the square was illuminated by two-hundred torches, made of reeds and frequently renewed. The music was produced by beating upon a rude drum, made of a deer-skin stretched tightly over a large kettle in which there was a little water. The women formed a circle round it, at a certain distance from each other, having their hands thrust into a ring of feathers which they twirled round their wrists, while they moved in silence from left to right. The men formed another circle, next to the one of the women, keeping at a distance of six feet from each other. Every one of the men had a hollow gourd, filled with small stones, with which he kept time, shaking it as he danced. As the women turned, in dancing, from left to right, the men turned from right to left. It was monotonous, and barbarous enough; but the scene was novel, and the French people took pleasure in gazing. The fitful, flaring light of the torches, the dark background of the forest, the wild dress and motions of the red-men, made an impressive picture.

The discarded Indian maiden now strove as earnestly to attract the admiration of the young brave, as in the morning he had done to excite that of the white girl. She was near him in the dance, and as she swayed to and fro in its measure, she shook the gay little bells which edged her robe, and twirled her wreath of feathers, with an air of graceful languishment, while the black eyes rested on the form of the man she loved, until his notice was attracted to her, when the glance of liquid light would sink and a sigh would heave her bosom. Tree-la-lu's eyes were a handsome oval, bright and intelligent; but otherwise she was ugly, like the other women

of her tribe ; being short and coarse-featured. Nevertheless, she was the belle of the village ; warriors and nobles had made overtures for the honor of her hand, and when she had made up her mind to dispose of it to the young chief, whose fame was growing amid his people, she had not entertained the slightest fear of having her preference slighted. It was doubly hard for her to find herself scorned on account of this beautiful and dazzling white girl. Hate and admiration struggled together in her bosom. She was almost equally fascinated with her lover by the charms which, to her unsophisticated eyes, seemed supernatural ; yet she hated them because they had beguiled her chieftain and led him to slight her own attractions. It was a consolation to her to know that Laughing Eyes had refused the Indian ; it revived her hopes, and also softened her anger at her rival ; but now, as she danced and twirled her feathery wreath, she saw that the heart and eyes of her partner were not with her, and she watched both him and the white woman with vigilance.

After an hour or two of dancing, the curiosity of the visitors being satisfied, they paid their compliments and said their farewells to the head of the assemblage, and departed for the fort. A young moon, sinking low in the west, dimly lighted their path homeward ; they made the two or three miles' walk a short one, with merry singing and laughter. Only Marguerite was thoughtful and silent—she who was usually the life of every company. The wild scenes which she had that day witnessed—the mimic action of imaginary battles—the rude war-song—the fierce discourse of excited chiefs—although they were the festival of this strange people, had made a deep and terrible impression upon her mind. Being a new-comer, she was more forcibly affected than those who had become familiar with the habits and manners of the Indians. Gay and fresh as was her nature, it was one of the sensitive kind, quick to receive impressions ; and she could not but realize how small a handful was her own people, and how utterly in the power of this native race, should they become aroused to the exercise of their superior might. She felt as if she and her friends were sporting on the brink of destruction. A weight settled on her spirits ; she longed for the return of Maurice, feeling that were she

once safe in his arms, she would beg him to return to *la belle France*, away from these uncongenial scenes. It was as if the future had cast backward a reflection upon the mirror of her mind, in which she saw pictured—what? Let us turn from it with shuddering and dismay, as she herself turned.

“Marguerite has fallen in love with some one of those handsome braves!” said a young man, tauntingly—in merri-ment only, for her engagement to her cousin was a well understood fact in the little colony.

“No—but to tell you the truth, I am homesick to-night,” she answered, “for the first time since I left Paris. I wish Maurice would come. You must see it is lonely for me without any relatives.”

“We, too, wish him safely back, and good luck to both of you! We’ll have a merry wedding of it, be sure of that; you’ll not get rid of your friends upon that occasion,” answered some of the company, kindly, for all of them liked Marguerite, and wished her well.

By this time they had come inside the palisades of the fort, and in front of the little dwelling where the maiden boarded, where they bade her good-night and sweet dreams of her lover. None of them had noticed the person who followed them away from the Indian village, flitting on their track, lightly and as silently as a shadow, up to the gate of the fort, where he turned back into the darkness, made deeper by the setting of the moon.

It was Rattlesnake, taking this method to spy out the thoughts of the French, and to learn if the lover of Laughing Eyes had yet arrived, and when he was expected.

CHAPTER III.

CLOPART, THE GOVERNOR.

ALL this time that Marguerite was embroidering her wedding-dress, and waiting for the return of Maurice Cantarelle from Natchitoches, the management of Clopart, the commander of the fort, was bringing trouble upon the colony under his charge. He was haughty and tyrannical to his own people, but to the Indians he was insolent and cruel. The haughty temper of the Natchez could not brook the wrongs which he delighted to heap upon them. Already there was the distant muttering of thunder, foretelling the coming storm. But the Natchez were not more proud than they were compliant and polite. They treated the French with extreme civility, and thus far there had been no outward demonstration of their growing restlessness under the yoke which he sought to place upon their necks.

As on the occasion of the visit to their village in time of festival, they seemed pleased and honored by the attendance of the pale-faces, so on all others they had behaved themselves with forbearance and courtesy. But it was not a week after this, that Clopart perpetrated an outrage upon the Natchez, which made more prudent persons fear for the consequences. Summoning to his presence the Great Sun, or chief ruler of the nation, he told him that he had received orders from Governor Périer, at New Orleans, to take possession of the beautiful village of the White Apple, which was a favorite village of the Natchez, situated six miles from the fort, and there to establish a plantation and construct certain buildings. He did not need this particular situation for his plantation; his object was simply to drive away the Natchez entirely. He told the chief that his people must remove to some other place which they could occupy without incommoding the French, and accompanied this peremptory and startling demand with no attempt at conciliation.

"Surely my white brother does not speak in earnest? He

only wishes to try the fortitude of the red-man. Does not my white brother know that the Natchez have lived in that village more years than there are hairs in this twisted scalp-lock which hangs from the top of my head to my waist?" remarked the chief, looking Clopart full in the eyes.

"Foolish barbarian," exclaimed the commander, with fierce contempt, "what ties of brotherhood can there be between my race and thine? I have no explanation or apology to give to such as you. It is sufficient for you to know that I obey superior orders. Obey mine!"

The habitual command of an Indian over his muscles and features could not entirely subdue the working of the red chief's lip, nor the flash of his eye.

"Brother, we have not been used to such treatment. So far, the French have taken nothing from us by force. What they possess we gave freely or they purchased. Wishing to live in peace with thy nation, I say to thee, 'We have other lands we can spare, take them.' Can we do more? But as to the village of White Apple, leave it untouched in the hands of the Natchez. There we have a temple, and there the bones of our ancestors have slept since we came to dwell on the banks of the father of rivers."

Listening to this touching appeal with an ironical smile, Clopart replied:

"Romantic Indian, I will not bandy fine sentiments with a savage. But mark my word, and remember that I shall keep it. Toward the latter part of November I expect a galley from New Orleans. If, when she arrives, the village of the White Apple is not delivered up to me, I will send you in chains to our great chief in our great village down the river. Thou seest that I make short work of it. Go."

"Good, I see," replied the Indian. "I will go home and lay this matter before the old and wise men of my nation."

Some white officers who had been present during this interview, ventured to remonstrate with their superior upon the unnecessary harshness of his demand, but he turned upon them with so much ire, that they were glad to retreat from his presence. To be

"Clothed in a little brief authority"
makes fools of some men.

"Whom the gods would destroy they first make mad," and it seemed as if the silly tyranny of this one officer was dooming those in his charge to a fate which should have been reserved for himself alone. What had transpired was spoken of freely in the fort, and though many disapproved of this order of their unpopular commander, and thought it calculated to excite needless hard feelings in the breasts of their Indian neighbors, few believed that these had really power to revenge their wrongs.

In the mean time, the Great Sun had returned home and called a meeting of the magnates of his nation. There was not a warrior but knew beforehand the subject of their coming deliberations. The order of Clopart, and the insulting words in which it was given, had flown like wild-fire through the tribe. It had applied the spark to the tinder laid ready for kindling. But when what had transpired was officially communicated by their king, there arose in the assembly a fresh outburst of indignation, which was hushed up, giving place to profound silence, when the chief of the White Apple was seen to rise. He was second in influence only to the Great Sun himself, being famous for his exploits as a warrior, and his eloquence as an orator.

Moved by the threatened destruction of his village, he made a speech which aroused the passions of his hearers to the highest pitch. He was answered, at various points of his address, by low and suppressed growls forcing their way, as it were, between the teeth of the grim-visaged assembly. Some of the young warriors, giving way to their excitement, started up from their seats, and uttering fierce threats, shook their tomahawks with wild fury, but soon calmed these outward tokens of their emotions as they met the rebuking glance of the majestic orator. It is well known that the Indians are possessed of a singular and native eloquence of speech, and it may easily be credited that on an occasion like this, this eloquence did not fail them. Every passion and sentiment was appealed to, from the veneration which they cherished for the bones of their ancestors preserved in their sacred temples, to the jealousy they felt for the "silver-tongued strangers," who were "turning the heads of their women," until the "very blood of the Natchez was tainted in its source." Their pride

as warriors was appealed to, not to allow their nation to be blotted out of existence, without at least perishing in its defense.

In the midst of all this tumult, Rattlesnake sat among the young warriors, intently listening, but taking no part in the proceedings. A smile of triumph lit up his face when the simultaneous war-cry announced the spontaneous decision of the assembly to resist the tyranny of the French. At that moment he was not thinking so much of the outraged honor of his race, as he was of the opportunity this event would give him for securing for his own the French girl for whom he had conceived so intense a passion. That she did not love him was to his savage mind no objection. The women of the Natchez were the slaves of the men; they had no will of their own, and no rights; he was too thoroughly imbued with the spirit of the master-sex to regard it as any drawback to his happiness to secure a wife by force. That the delicate pale-face was a warbling bird who ought not to work in the garden, nor carry corn on her back, he had decided; as he had promised her, when making his proposal, he intended to keep her from hard labor, but further than this the niceties of his mental perceptions did not reach.

Already, in his mind's eye, as the discussions of the council proceeded, he saw Laughing Eyes his prisoner and the inmate of his hut, and his rifle-ball in the heart of her hated white lover, should that person have returned before the consummation of this wild bridal. It is no wonder that Marguerite shuddered in her little room, working on her white embroidery, while plots so red as these were forming in the brain of the stealthy and persistent savage.

Before the wise men of the Natchez left their council-chamber, it was decided in what way to resist the invasion of Clopart, and to be revenged for the insults he had heaped upon them. It was agreed to send messengers to the Yazoos, the Chickasaws, the Choctaws, and other tribes, who, having also suffered from the oppressions of the French, were supposed to be ready to enter into any scheme of retaliation—to invite them to forget their past hostilities with the Natchez, and unite with them in a holy alliance against the common enemy. If the proposition was adopted by their wise men

bundles, made up of an equal number of small sticks, were to be remitted to each tribe, from which one stick was to be removed each day. The last remaining stick was to designate the day upon which the combined attack was to be made against the French, over the whole face of the country. Thus assailed by surprise, cut off from the reciprocal succor which the several settlements would give to each other if this plan were not adopted, the French would be compelled to succumb to the vastly superior numbers brought to bear against them. For the successful execution of this plan, it was necessary to gain time; and for this purpose, their sovereign was entreated to enter into negotiations with the hungry French wolf—the crocodile-hearted chief—in yonder fort, to obtain, by dint of presents, that their removal be postponed sufficiently for their plot to arrive at maturity.

In conclusion, it was suggested by the chief of the White Apple, that the utmost secrecy be observed; to secure which it would be absolutely necessary to keep their designs a secret from their women.

“Women,” said the chief, “are fickle and indiscreet, and they can no more keep a secret than a sieve can hold water. Besides, many of them love the French, and would certainly betray us. Therefore, let us swear, before we separate, to keep our lips sealed, and not to say one word which might give to our women the slightest intimation of what we intend.”

Those were not the days of woman’s rights, it is evident. The pledge of secrecy was taken. Among the ambassadors chosen to communicate their designs to the neighboring tribes, was Rattlesnake, who was to be the bearer of the message and the bundle of sticks to the Chickasaws. His fleetness of foot and his smoothness of tongue were his recommendations to this embassy. He would eagerly have accepted the commission had it not been that he was loth to leave the vicinity of the fort even for so short a time.

Ardent, loving little Marguerite did not dream that the arrival of her lover was watched for by another almost as eagerly as by herself. Yet so it was. The jealous Indian haunted the fort, to the neglect of his hunting, often hovering unseen in the vicinity of the white girl’s dwelling, not

only to feast his eyes upon an occasional sight of her, but to ascertain whether Maurice Cantarelle was arrived. Now that this errand was to take him away for some days, he feared that his rival might reach the fort during his absence; however, it would not do to hesitate, since hesitation would be looked upon by the council as a want of earnestness in the matter, and his fidelity would be suspected. He therefore accepted the service, and girded himself for the journey.

The next day after this meeting of the council, their sovereign called at the French fort, and representing to Clopart how ill prepared they were to move so suddenly, without having selected the place whither they could transport their effects, he obtained that the fulfillment of the order of expulsion should be postponed until the latter part of December, provided that the Natchez should pay to the commander, in the interval, a contribution consisting of one barrel of corn, and a certain quantity of fowls, furs and bear's oil, for each and every cabin of the White Apple village; which was a valuable contribution, considering that there were eighty cabins in the village. The Great Sun and Clopart parted with mutual satisfaction at the bargain they had made; the one having gratified his appetite for gain, and the other expecting to secure his revenge.

The excitement of the warriors, the departure of the messengers, and all the movements following upon the council, had not taken place without exciting the curiosity of the Natchez women. With feminine tact they endeavored to wile the secret from their husbands or lovers; but the conspiracy to which they had devoted themselves was of too serious a nature to allow the warriors to break the pledge which they had given.

One woman, however, was resolved to discover what was going on. Tree-la-lu, or Little Bird, was moved by deeper motives than those of mere curiosity. Her unhappiness since the day of the festival had been as deep as it was silent. Rattlesnake had no more idea of the jealous eye which forever tracked him to the fort and back, than Marguerite of his own untiring vigilance. When she saw him depart upon a journey, as if to be absent some time, she guessed that nothing but the most powerful motives would induce him to

withdraw from his secret pursuit of the French girl. Little Bird possessed quick judgment and keen instincts; her ear was acute, and her footstep light as the fall of dew upon the grass. Having resolved to know what was going on among the men of her nation, it is not surprising that she succeeded in getting such an inkling of the truth as to convince her that an attack upon the fort was meditated; from this, the logic of jealousy proved clearly to her mind that Rattlesnake would seize the opportunity to take prisoner Laughing Eyes, who would then be obliged to become his wife, whether or not she wished it herself.

Day after day she brooded over this, as she sat in the sun, working belts and moccasins, until, one by one, the messengers who had gone off on their secret mission returned, and among the others her lover. Then the council met again to listen to the joint report. Little Bird knew the midnight hour at which they were to meet at the council-house. Risking every thing to obtain the knowledge she coveted, she stole forth from her cabin a couple of hours before the appointed time for the conclave to open, gliding by a roundabout path to that part of the village in which the council-chamber stood.

The cabins of the Natchez were really substantial houses, built of logs and mortar, of comfortable size, containing sometimes two large apartments.

The council-room was near the temple, and was built of squared logs, elevated a foot from the ground, and resting upon solid posts at the corners. With a heart beating high from fear and excitement, Tree-la-lu crept near this building. The night was intensely dark, but her eyes were like those of a wild animal—she could see very well in the dark. Cautiously reconnoitering every side, she approached the back of the house, to a spot which she had marked during the day, where a little hollow in the ground running under the floor made a space large enough to admit her body. Creeping into this, she waited until the warriors began to arrive, and torches were lit in the council-room. A glimmer of light showed her where to place her ear to catch the drippings of sound from above; she could hear distinctly every word which was uttered during the confab which followed, and

was rewarded for her painful position and the risks of betrayal which she ran, by coming into possession of the particulars of the plot against the French. She heard all about the bundle of sticks which had been given to the other tribes, and that the bundle belonging to the Natchez was deposited for safe keeping in the temple, and from which, each day, a stick was drawn. She remained in her hiding-place until the council broke up, who were in excellent spirits at hearing with what eagerness the other tribes had entered into the arrangement. Waiting a safe time after the last warrior had deserted the building, she crept out from the hole, and fled home, undiscovered. The warrior was powerful and intelligent; but the woman was jealous and subtle.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WARNING.

ON a bright day in the early part of November, Marguerite, with the woman at whose house she was stopping, went a little beyond the palisades, to gather a basket of pecan-nuts. Her spirits had been drooping for some time; she was actually growing pale with watching for her bridegroom; she needed the exercise, and as she walked along in the bracing air, so welcome after the hot southern summer, she felt her gayety revive. Warbling little snatches of French love-songs betweentimes, she kept up a lively conversation with her companion until they came to the little grove of stately pecans; there both of them became absorbed in their pleasant labor. Marguerite, throwing sticks up into the trees, and stooping to gather the nuts which fell, upon rising from her knees, was startled to find herself confronted by an Indian girl, who had approached so close as to touch her, but in such silence that she was unaware of her neighborhood. The girl had a basket, also, which was half filled with nuts. She smiled at Marguerite's exclamation, who then recognized her as the one who had given her the necklace of shells at

the festival of the *Moon of New Corn*, and who smiled in return, saying in her pleasant voice:

"Good morning—but I don't know your name."

"It is Little bird," replied the Indian, in tolerable French; then stooping over the maiden's basket, as if to examine it, she said, in a low tone: "Our people are no longer your friends. I have always liked the French. Ask your white chief if his fort is strong, and if he sleeps with his eyes open."

"What do you mean?" answered Marguerite, in the same tone, the vague uneasiness which had so long haunted her at once taking definite shape.

"The Natchez will shut the eyes of the white chief with soft words. But they hate him as the wild horse hates the bridle. Their knives are whetted, the powder is ready in their rifles. Before another moon broadens to the width of the one you will see to-night, the Natchez will sit in the seat of the false-hearted white officer."

"Oh, what shall I do?" cried Marguerite, turning pale as she listened, and gazing into the glittering eyes of the Indian girl with touching appeal.

"Nothing," said the other; "you cannot fly. The tribes have risen all along the father of waters. They are like the blades of grass. They will sweep away the French, as the fire sweeps the prairie when it is dry. Little Bird has wished to carry the twig in her mouth to lay it before the white chief. Let him strengthen his fort, and keep the flame and thunder ready in the big guns."

"I will tell him," said Marguerite, "but I do not think he will believe it. He is a bad and cruel man."

"Tell him that one told you who will not lie. When is the white girl's brave coming back from Natchitoches?"

The last question was put suddenly, and the keen eyes of the Indian read the face of her companion, who answered:

"I have looked for him many weeks. Oh, I wish I could fly to Natchitoches. I should be safe there, with Maurice."

"You would be safe there for the present. But the Natchez have likewise plotted to get the better of St. Denis. Do you know there is a warrior of my people who is keeping his wigwam empty for the day when he shall bring the white maiden to it, over the corpse of her own brave?"

Poor Marguerite shuddered and hid her face in her hands.

"Never! never! tell him I will kill myself. Ah! if he truly loves me, why does he not let me alone, when I wish it?"

"I cannot tell him. I have waited days to bring you this warning. Rattlesnake watches me with his cunning eyes, for he knows that when a woman is jealous it makes her dangerous. Let Laughing Eyes beware. He lies coiled before her door, and he looks beautiful and like the rainbow as the sun plays over him—but he is coiled to strike."

"What shall I do?" said the white girl again.

"There is but one thing. Let the white chief be on the watch."

There were others, who had been in and about the grove, now drawing nigh; the woman who came with Marguerite approached, thinking the Indian girl was trying to make a bargain in selling her nuts. Tree-la-lu wandered on, gathering the fruit diligently, as if that only was in her thoughts; but shortly after, again coming near the French girl, she said:

"Keep it secret what bird it was that brought the twig in its mouth."

"I will. Do you know what day the attack will occur?"

"No. The sticks are in the temple. If I find out the time, and can send a message, I will send you a present of a *red* basket, the day before the Natchez are ready."

Marguerite looked up quickly and suspiciously.

"Why are *you*," she asked, "the friend of the French, against your own people?"

The only answer of the girl was a shrug of the shoulders, and a low laugh; but as she walked off by herself again, she muttered:

"There is more fire in the heart of an Indian woman than in these pale-faces. Our blood is redder and warmer. I do not love the French. But I love Rattlesnake; and I would save the whole white people before I would see him in possession of the French woman whom he covets. Little Bird will be his wife, whether he wishes it or not. He shall yet wear the belt which he has shamed her by returning."

The brightness had all gone out of the day now for Marguerite. Look which way she would, she seemed to see

stains of blood on everything—the blue sky, the bright rose, the green fields. She hurried to fill her basket that she might have an excuse for returning home. The woman who accompanied her rallied her on the change of her spirits, declaring that she was love-sick, and so impatient to be back, for fear that Maurice might have arrived in her absence. The jesting words fell upon her soul like blows. She felt as if an awful fate were impending over all; over this thoughtless mother, and her two little innocent children at home, over other mothers and children, over the brave little garrison whose only fault was that it had so unworthy a commander.

When they arrived at the house, Marguerite made an excuse for being absent an hour or two, and went directly to the quarters of the commander. She had resolved that it was the best thing for her to inform him personally of the warning she had received.

Clopart was in his house, and upon being ushered into his presence, the young girl found him alone. He turned upon her a careless eye, while he asked in an arrogant voice upon what business she had intruded upon his time. He had not even the courtesy to offer her a chair, and Marguerite, standing there in his lofty presence, felt something of the same indignation which had roused the slumbering fury of the Natchez. The tidings she had to communicate were of too much importance, however, to admit of more than a passing personal feeling. In a clear and concise statement she laid before him all the information which she had received from Little Bird, but concealing the name of her informant. Her heart sunk within her when she saw the indifferent, contemptuous manner with which he listened to her story.

“Who’s been telling you such stuff?”

“A Natchez woman, who said she was friendly to the French. Indeed, Monsieur Commander, I am certain there is truth in it.”

“Well, I don’t ask you for your opinion, Mademoiselle. Some squaw has been trying to frighten you, for the fun of the thing. Don’t annoy me with your nonsense again—though to be sure, we can put up with some silliness when it comes from a mouth as pretty as yours;” and he, beginning to observe the beauty of his visitor, which was rare enough in the

colony, favored her with a smile quite as disagreeable as his frown. She would have retired immediately, but her mind was too fully impressed with the reality of the danger, not to compel her to make one more effort to convince the officer who had the fate of the fort in his keeping, so she continued:

"I am certain that mischief is preparing. I pray you, sir, to at least be cautious—be on your guard!"

"Perhaps I had better resign my command to Mademoiselle's hands," he said, with cool irony, glancing at them as she clasped them in supplication. He condescended, however, to add, "I assure you, you need not trouble your pretty head. The Indians are crafty—quite too cunning for your little brain, I fear. They wish to escape the payment of the tribute which they have promised in return for the permission to stay in the village of the White Apple a few weeks longer; not only that, but, if they can frighten me sufficiently, they hope to escape the necessity for leaving at all. All these little hints which they are throwing out, are for this purpose. I understand the rascals. Don't be alarmed, little girl. And now, if you have anything to say on a more interesting subject, I will hear it. Are you married?"

The tone of insolent familiarity which he put on, as he attempted to take her hand, alarmed her so much that she retreated instantly to the door, and with a hasty bow, departed.

"I can never go to see him again," she thought, as she hurried home. "And it would do no good if I did. He says that they are cunning and crafty, yet he refuses to be warned against their intrigues. God grant that what he says about their motives be true. But I cannot believe it. Ah, *Mon Dieu*, if he felt about it as I do, there would be less danger. If he would be prepared, and have the fort in readiness, I think it could be defended. I wish Maurice would come. *He* might have some influence!"

Thousands of times she had breathed that wish, but never with such earnestness as now. But Maurice did not come. Day after day she inquired, through a friendly acquaintance, a sub-Lieutenant who knew the most of the Government business, if there were any arrivals of persons or messages from Natchitoches. She would long since have given up her

plan of surprising Maurice, and sent him word of her arrival in the country, but no dispatches had recently gone to that far-away post, the way to which was difficult and dangerous. Now she would herself gladly have undertaken the journey, had she been able to find a guide. Although its perils would be extreme, she felt as if no danger was greater than that of remaining in the fort. She told the sub-Lieutenant of her fears; who was so impressed by their probability that he undertook, himself, to arouse Clopart to a realization of his position. His efforts met with no better success than those of the girl had done. Indeed, the bare mention of the subject made him angry. A soldier who had also been warned, probably by Little Bird herself, ventured to admonish the commander, who, instead of inquiring into the meaning of these repeated warnings, called the soldier a coward and a visionary, put him in the stocks to punish him for spreading false reports, and declared that he would certainly abstain from repairing the fortifications, or from doing anything that would give the Natchez to understand that he was afraid of them—because the secret motives of all these warnings, as he pretended, was to frighten him out of his resolution to compel them to evacuate the village of the White Apple. Such was the fatal infatuation of the commander of the fort!

In the mean time Marguerite lived in such a state of apprehension, that the smallest sound caused her to startle and her cheek to turn pale. Through the long and restless nights she scarcely slept at all. Each moment she expected to hear the savage war-whoop, and to see enacted in dreadful reality the scenes which, even in their mimic performance, had taken so powerful a hold upon her imagination. Look where she would in the dark, she saw the burning eyes of Rattlesnake gleaming out of the obscurity. She grew feverish and ill—so excited and nervous, that the family with which she stayed naturally attributed her excessive apprehension to the state of her system. They thought she might be coming down with one of the fevers of the climate. At first, they had felt alarmed, when she communicated to them the warning she had received; but the merchant, whose thoughts were mostly in his business, seeing that Clopart gave no credit to the rumor, began to laugh at it himself, and to rally the young girl

on her foolish fancies. His heart was in the galley which was expected soon from New Orleans, and in which he had valuable merchandise. So his rosy wife smiled at her work, and his two little children laughed in the sunshine, as usual. It seemed to Marguerite as if nobody *would* see the cloud but herself. She felt an oppression, as if the fate of the whole thriving settlement, with all its flourishing fortunes and precious lives, rested upon her conscience. Yet she had done all she could. She hoped that Tree-la-lu would find means to see her again, and either relieve her anxiety or give her more definite information ; but the girl did not come near her.

Once Rattlesnake himself came to see her. He brought her a present of some wild-plums which he had found in the forest, but he stayed only a few moments, and made no reference whatever to the topic of his last conversation with her. That visit was no comfort to Marguerite. She was now so almost magnetically alive to all that passed, it seemed to her that she could read the thoughts of anticipated triumph which shone in his black eyes—something, intense and lustrous, not a smile, but the gleam of anticipation, lurked in his gaze.

And still the days and nights, dreary and endless as they were, were not long enough ; for the moon had moved to the full and was on the wane, and Maurice had not come, and Little Bird had said, that before the moon had filled its first new quarter, the French would be exterminated. At length an apathetic dullness settled over Marguerite. Her nerves had been so long strained to an unnatural tension, that a reaction took place. The dreadful vision of fire and massacre which was forever before her eyes did not vanish ; she only stared at it helplessly. Knowing that any attempt at personal safety would be useless, should the fort fall, and that there was absolutely nothing to be done, but to suffer such fate as was in store, she grew numb under the presence of continual terror.

She had made frantic efforts to get a passage to New Orleans, or to find some persons who could be induced to go to Natchitoches, but had failed in all. The fact that the rising of the Indians was to be universal precluded any hope of escape by flight. If there was safety anywhere, it was in the

fort. Oh, if Clopart would but do his duty—would be warned in time!

But let us return to Little Bird. Finding with surprise, by means which she took to keep herself informed, of the little effect her warnings had upon the commander of the fort, she was obliged, reluctantly, to give up hopes of saving it, at least from a dangerous attack. But she did not despair, even in that case, of being able to thwart the designs of Rattlesnake, as far as they included the possession of the white maiden. Before she would see him happy with the pale-face, she herself would wing an arrow, or mingle a cup of poison, destined for the white girl. But in doing this, she must be wary; for should Rattlesnake detect her hand in the business, she knew that his vengeance upon her would be sure. In the mean time, having given her mind to the effort to warn the French, she grew ardent for its success; and without any particular motive, either of humanity or love, she resolved to do what was in her power to balk the enterprise of her own people. She reflected that if she could withdraw a few of the sticks from the bundle which measured the time of the concerted attack upon all the settlements, she would disarrange the day of operations, so that the other settlements would receive warning in time to prepare for the blow. This would hasten the day of the attack upon Fort Natchez; but as the struggle would be no more bloody upon that account, she thought this would be no objection.

But the bundle of sticks was kept in the sacred temple, where it would be dangerous, if not impossible, to reach it. The plebeians, or common people, to whom Little Bird belonged, were never permitted to enter the precincts of the sacred edifice, which was always under guard, because here the sacred and eternal fire was kept burning, to allow which to expire was death to the guilty watchers. Eight of these guardians served at one time, in keeping the holy flame continually rising.

As we have said, Little Bird was the belle of the village; her fascinations were admitted by many of the young braves; these she now used to the utmost of her power to soften the sensibilities of one of the guard, who finally yielded to her overwhelming solicitations to be permitted a peep into the

temple. Supposing her moved only by the curiosity of her sex, and persuaded by her, that the sin, if unknown, would not be a sin, he admitted her, in the darkness of midnight, into the sanctuary, where, having overcome the first great obstacle, she found it comparatively easy to cover her withdrawal of eight of the sticks from the bundle there deposited.

But even the bold heart of Little Bird quivered in her bosom, when, coming out of the temple, she was addressed in a low voice by some one who stood near, in the darkness. The voice was that of Rattlesnake. She knew at once that she had been followed; that the suspicion which she endeavored to avert was fixed upon her.

The village in which the sacred temple stood was several miles from the one in which Tree-la-lu dwelt; to reach it, she had traveled since sundown; and now she knew that all that time a silent foot was tracking her own. She instantly tried to recall what look, expression or occurrence could have served to waken the watchfulness which she had wished to avoid. She could think of nothing. She had kept her own counsel, except what she had confided to the white maiden and the soldier; and these she did not believe had betrayed her. Satisfied, upon a rapid survey of the past, that the warrior could have no proofs against her, and that he was probably acting upon slight suspicions, she grew immediately as calm as before; even while she began to answer him, the momentary quiver of her pulse subsided, and her voice was perfectly steady. She was afraid that he might take hold of her and discover the sticks which she had slipped beneath her shawl; she did not dare to drop them so near the temple, lest they should be observed in the morning, but her voice betrayed nothing of what was passing in her mind.

"Why do you come here to profane the temple at this solemn hour?"

"I thought not to profane it, but only to here adore the Great Spirit which watches over the Natchez. I know that the foot of one like me ought not to be set therein; but oh, Rattlesnake, you know that I am sad and desolate. He only whom I love in this world loves not me; and I thought, perhaps, if I should supplicate the Great Spirit, here in his

own temple, to soften the heart that is all stone to me, he would hear my prayer."

Indifferent as the young warrior might be to the affection of the girl who made him this artful answer, he was not proof against flattery.

"Your excuse is good," said he, "but do not repeat the offense. You will be punished if it becomes known."

"It is all one to me. I have no desire to live. Since I am trampled under the foot of my master, who will not have me even for his slave, I will not plant corn nor cook food for any other. Let me die."

"Tush," said the brave, disdainfully, "you have a fair portion to bring your husband, and you will marry soon. Why not take one of the fine French chiefs, with their beards and their broadcloth coats?"

"Because I hate the French. I wish they were all driven away from here. If the Natchez warriors had the fire in their blood which their ancestors had, these pale-faces would not taunt us in our own places. It is time the women should begin to fight."

"Ay!" replied Rattlesnake, taken off his guard, in the deep tone of exultation, "we will attend to that. You women need not trouble yourselves."

"But why did you follow me here to-night?" asked the girl, who all this time was walking slowly along, and whenever she came to the darkest shadows, dropped one of the sticks upon the ground.

"To see what you were about," was the curt reply.

"I do not see why it is," continued she, "that you returned me my belt. I have looked closely at all the maidens of our village, and I do not see that any of them is pleasing in the eyes of Rattlesnake. Perhaps he is going to take the war-path, and when he returns he will be kinder to Little Bird."

This she said in order to conceal from him that she had detected the real object of his affections; concealing the jealousy which devoured her soul, and making no allusion to the French girl. Rattlesnake, not looking for this profound dissimulation in anything so utterly senseless as a woman, was satisfied that she knew nothing, either of the meditated

attack upon the fort, or of his design of taking to himself a white wife. Viewing her mission to the temple in the flattering light in which she had placed it, he no longer condescended to shorten his steps to hers, but strode forward on the path, leaving her to make her way home unattended. Tree-la-lu would rather he should have been cruel and harsh with her, than so utterly indifferent. As his steps outstripped hers until she no longer could catch their distant echo, she sunk down at the foot of a tree, and bowed her forehead to the damp ground, while a storm of passion swept over her. In return for all her ardent confession, he had not said one kind word to her; the spell of the French girl's charms was too powerful for her weak hands to break. In a few days, Rattlesnake would bear the white bride to his cabin, and she, poor Tree-la-lu, might tear her hair and weep her eyes out in vain. "In such a case," she whispered to herself, in a hard voice, "if she could have nothing sweeter, she would have revenge."

CHAPTER V.

THE RED BASKET.

THREE weeks had elapsed since the day upon which Marguerite, going out for the pecan-nuts, received the first intimation of the hostility of the Natchez. The time, to her, had seemed unendurably long, yet she trembled to find it flying. Her wedding-dress was finished and put away in her chest; she no longer liked to look at it, but passed the hours in dull reverie, wishing herself and Maurice back in the dear old house of their grandmother, where all had been so safe and quiet.

The noon meal of the family had been partaken of, and the young girl was assisting the mistress to clear away the table, when a shadow fell across the floor from the open door. Marguerite started, as she did now constantly, and turning; beheld standing in the entrance an old squaw, who apparently had berries to sell; instantly her eyes became riveted upon a

red basket, the only one of that color out of the six or eight which the woman carried. Every vestige of color fled out of her face as she recognized the fatal signal. It was with difficulty that she repressed the scream which rose to her lips; she could not speak, but sunk upon a seat, while the mistress of the house went forward to invite the Indian woman to rest herself, and to ask the price of her berries. The withered old creature, who could not speak any French, made motions to signify that the red basket was for the maiden, before whom she set it down, and then abruptly departed, without waiting for any reward for the fruit contained in it.

"*Mon Dieu!*" murmured Marguerite, as soon as she could speak, "this is the token I was to receive to signify that the fort was about to be attacked."

"What is it? What do you mean?" cried the mistress of the house, alarmed by the words and manner of the other.

"The red basket!"

"What of it?"

"I tell you it is the signal. We are lost, my friend, we are lost!"

"Poor child, your head is turned. What has a basket of berries to do with an attack upon the fort?"

"I tell you again that it is the signal. The Indian girl promised me that she would warn me of the time when the attack was about to begin by sending me a red basket. The woman who brought it must be her mother; I saw a resemblance between them. Who knows how soon the trouble will begin? Yet no one is alarmed, no one is prepared. I will go again to Clopart. I will take the basket with me to show him, to tell him. I will beg him to close the gates, and to prepare himself."

As she was about to rush from the house upon this errand, the merchant returned to it, in high spirits, to inform his wife of the arrival of the expected galley from New Orleans, richly freighted with the needed articles of food, clothing and medicines. She paused to explain to him the meaning of the basket. He could not be so careless as not to feel apprehensive at the sight of this mysterious warning. He looked gravely at his children and his wife, his brow clouded, and

he offered to proceed, in the girl's stead, to the commander, show him the basket, and solicit him to instantly close the portals, and put himself on the defensive.

During his absence, the two women sat looking in each other's blank faces, not knowing what to do where nothing could be done. In about an hour the merchant returned with the information that Clopart was not within the limits of the fort; that he had gone off with a party of Frenchmen, to feast and drink with the Natchez in their own great village. Clopart had indeed carried his madness to that extent. In order to show in a signal manner his contempt for the alarming reports which had been made to him, he had gone to the Natchez to spend the night in carousal with the Great Sun and his chiefs, to whom he told, as a good joke, the stories which had been brought to him of the enmity of those with whom he was now on such excellent terms. The sovereign of the Natchez took pains to compliment his discretion, and to assure him that his real enemies were those who brought these idle tales; in proof whereof, he declared his people should to-morrow bring the white chief the amount of the tribute which had been promised, and would then put him in possession of the White Apple village.

In the mean time, the merchant in whose family Marguerite resided, felt his courage revive, as he ascertained the course which the commander was pursuing. He did not believe that an officer like Clopart could be so unfitted for his duty, as to do as he was doing, without he had the best of reasons for trusting the Natchez. So he banished the chill, uneasy feeling which possessed him, as far as possible, played with the children upon his knees, and laughed at the cowardly women-folks.

Feeling it useless to attempt any thing more for the salvation of her friends, Marguerite set herself down in the back door, to calm her mind and consider if there was any possible step to be taken to save herself from the fate which she saw impending. It was not the prospect of death which so utterly dismayed her. Although a cruel death, to one so young and full of love, in the midst of circumstances so appalling, was enough to blast her shuddering soul to contemplate, yet this was not the fullness of her dread. She remembered the

words of Little Bird, that she was destined for the wife of the Natchez chief whom she had refused. It was not for such a wedding that she had crossed the ocean which rolled between her and the ties of the past—this savage and unnatural bridal, cursed by the blood of her friends. Desolate beyond description did the poor girl feel in this crisis. There was no one to care more for her than they would for any passing acquaintance. It was true that all were alike threatened; but she felt then, in her solitude, as if even to die with some one who cherished her, would be a relief.

A short distance from the little garden into which she was looking, the river stretched away in broad and languid folds. She could see the newly-arrived galley where it lay by the little dock, with the tri-color flying from its mast. Oh that she was on board of that vessel, and that its sails were set for the distant sea! At that moment, the yellow water, glittering in the light of the descending sun, was the kindest looking object of all to which she turned her eyes or thoughts. To fly to it, and find rest beneath its waves, from her relentless pursuers, would not be so very dreadful. But in order to be sure of even this security, it would be necessary for her to be near it in the hour of danger. While she sat, pondering the matter, she detected a little canoe, lying close in to the shore, which some one had left there, moored to a bush which grew on the bank. She had often noticed it there before to-day; but now it appeared to her in the shape of a deliverer. As we have said, the girl was not wanting in energy; and with the first gleam of hope, some of her old strength and coolness returned. She resolved to wait until dark, then to steal down to the bank, climb the palisades, and take possession of the bark. But what to do then? There were houses, occupied by planters, standing here and there, for miles around the fort; but she had been told that the attack would be general, and she had no doubt that all these families were doomed, as well as any and every Frenchman or settlement perhaps the whole length of the river. To reach any of these would afford, at the best, but temporary shelter. One moment she would think it better to remain and meet her fate in the midst of her acquaintances; the next, the glittering eyes of Rattlesnake would rise in her memory, causing her to feel

that it would be better to get far enough away from him to avoid a love which was worse than hate.

She remained in the door, watching the river until the sun set, and she was called to partake of the evening meal. Little as she felt inclined to eat, she considered that it would be better to maintain her strength with food; so she partook of the corn-bread and milk which formed their simple supper, and before she left the table slipped a couple of pieces of the bread into the pocket of her dress. She was preparing for that vague journey she knew not whither nor toward what.

By this time the sunset had deepened into twilight. Believing that the attack would take place at the dead hour of midnight, she resolved to quit the house at once, and make her way, in the dusk, to the canoe. Into this she would creep, and lie by the shore, in the shadow of the bushes, until she heard something to convince her that the attack had really commenced, when she would paddle out into the stream, and float down the current, committing herself to Providence. Hugging the dear little children in her arms, she helped their mother to undress them, dropped a bitter tear over their unconscious faces, smiling in their sleep, went into the garden, climbed the fence, and made her way across the space which lay between the house and the river. She was obliged to surmount the palisades, which here ran down to the water's edge, for the canoe lay on the other side of the wall, where it sloped down on the bank. This was not difficult to accomplish, for the wall being strengthened on the inside by banks of earth, she easily climbed to the summit by means of these. Here she paused to ascertain if the canoe was still in its place. Through the semi-darkness, which was partially lighted by a young moon shining through clouds, she saw it at rest, just as it lay when she observed it by daylight. There appeared to be no one near enough to notice her movements; she could hear the men talking in the galley and on the docks, and see the lights beginning to twinkle from the windows of the houses. Swinging herself over the palisades, she hung by her hands an instant, then dropped lightly down upon the ground beneath.

It was not more than a rod from here that the bark was bored. In a few moments she had loosened the cord which

tied it to a stout bush, waded out a step or two into the water, and stepped into the canoe. Then, for the first time, she perceived that she was not alone. A tall Indian, with one stride, passed from the shore to her side, sat down, took up a paddle, and struck out into the stream. She was too astonished and terrified to scream or speak, and in the pause, he asked :

"What Laughing Eyes do with my canoe?"

It was Rattlesnake. She recognized him by his voice, and could also make out his features in the faint moonlight.

"I did not know it was yours," she gasped. "I thought I would take a little ride on the water."

He chuckled as if intensely pleased.

"Me paddle for you," he said. "Laughing Eyes need not tremble. I will bring her back in one little time."

He struck out into the stream. If the waters beneath her had been rushing over her, Marguerite could not have felt worse. More than once she opened her lips to shriek, but could not summon the power. He paddled up to the galley and all about it. This gave her some confidence. She saw that he did not intend any present harm, or he would take her away from the fort. He paddled up and down the river, shooting about with extreme swiftness, laughing at his own skill and at her evident fright. That unpleasant ride may have been of half an hour's duration, but to her it seemed endless. Finally she found herself at the starting-point. The Indian leaped ashore, and as she followed him, he said, still with the same chuckle of satisfaction :

"How you like it? Rattlesnake's canoe swift as an arrow. White brave has not come for Laughing Eyes. He has married squaw and forgotten her. Rattlesnake's house very lonesome. Bring your sewing-silk, and fill it full of sunbeams. Soon—come soon."

Then seizing her in one arm, he climbed, with the agility of a squirrel, partly up the palisades, by some small foothold which he obtained, swung her over the pickets to the top, and jumped down again, saying :

"Laughing Eyes go home. She shall not be hurt."

Sick at heart, Marguerite obeyed him, for she had nothing else to do. This proof of how closely she was watched, showed that an attempt to escape the general fate which might

be in store for all would be unavailing. She did not doubt that the Indian had released his prey upon this occasion only because he was so sure of it. He was playing with her as a cat plays with the mouse which it has doomed. He did not wish to run the risk of arousing the garrison, by abducting the girl before the train was sprung upon the fort.

All that night she remained on her knees, trying to pray and to gather faith, but with every nerve on the strain, and her ears and brow aching with the stretch of expectation. Yet those black hours of suspense rolled by, one by one, without bringing any cause for alarm, and as the sun once more, more welcome and glorious than ever before, shot his arrows of gold over the horizon, himself, like a good huntsman, still lying *perdu*, exhausted by her vigils, Marguerite fell asleep.

CHAPTER VI.

THE EVE OF ST. ANDREW'S.

FAIR and clear dawned the morning of the 29th of November. No sun ever rose more brightly than this which was destined to set in fire and blood. Later in the night, the commander of the fort had returned from his drunken frolic with the chiefs of the Natchez, and had retired to bed, giving the most particular orders, that upon no account must he be disturbed before nine o'clock.

Long before the break of day there was a great bustling in all the villages of the Natchez. By eight o'clock the Great Sun was seen departing from the village at the head of his nobles and a band of warriors. The procession moved with a great noise of instruments, and carried, with as much show as possible, the stipulated tribute of fowls, corn, oil and furs. The master of ceremonies, gorgeously dressed, and making himself conspicuous above the rest, twirled on high, with fantastic gestures, the calumet of peace. With demonstrations of joy, they paraded several times around the fort, before entering it.

In the mean time, with such foresight and precision had the conspirators taken their measures, that, at the same moment, the house of every Frenchman, within a radius of many miles, found itself full of Indians asking for this thing or that. Some begged for powder, shot, and bread, to go on a hunting expedition, promising an ample return for the loan demanded. Others had a present to make, or an old-remembered debt to pay, or some bargain or other to propose. Motives or excuses of infinite variety were not wanting to allay suspicion.

The barbarous music of the procession which was moving around the fort aroused Marguerite from the light sleep into which she had fallen. Coming out of the little closet which served her for a bedroom, she found the family gathered in the door, looking out to see the cause of the tumult.

"You are as white as my wife's night-cap," laughed the merchant, making room for her: "come, look at this! and see how silly you have been to be frightened. It is only the Natchez bringing the promised tribute to our commander. They could not possibly be more friendly. You see they display the calumet of peace. And I tell you that I am not sorry to find that our stock of corn is going to be so handsomely replenished—it was getting scarce."

"Hold me high, papa, to see the drums," cried the oldest child, a little fellow of three years, and his father took him in his arms.

"They mean well, I'm sure," said the young mother, drawing a breath of relief.

"God grant it!" murmured Marguerite.

In the mean time the procession entered the gate and proceeded to the house of the commander; who, aroused by the music, made his appearance at the door in his morning-gown. Elated at the sight of the valuable presents which were laid before him, laughing in his heart at the credulity of those who had attempted to arouse his suspicions against these good friends, Clopart graciously received the tribute, condescending to offer the Great Sun a drink of brandy out of his own liquor case. Then, the Indians began to dance, to sing, and to creep into the fort and everywhere. A chosen band of warriors glided down the bank of the river where was moored the long-expected and richly-loaded galley. They

passed by the house from which Marguerite looked out. The merchant smiled, and said: "How do you do?" "Good-morning," as they turned their eyes in that direction, but the young girl shrunk back with a shudder—she was not so much accustomed to the red-men.

Hardly had this dozen of savages passed, when her quick eye recognized Rattlesnake, and another Indian, coming toward the house, laughing, and making gestures as if they desired to present the inmates a wild turkey, which one of them carried. Their guns were slung over their shoulders, but their whole manner was extremely friendly. Marguerite shrunk back to the furthest verge of the apartment as they came to the steps, but the merchant, with his boy in his arms, stood in the door to receive them; and the child laughed as the feet of the bird were placed in his outstretched hand. As Rattlesnake handed the turkey to the boy and his father, his lightning glance swept the room, until it met Marguerite's. If hell had suddenly opened and she had seen the red glow of its molten fires, her eyes would not have been more blasted. She sunk down upon the bench behind her, her eyes turning away.

At that moment came the destruction of Fort Natchez. Even at that instant, while Clopart laughed, drinking the health of his red guests, while the babe smiled on the mother's arm, and the sun shone cheerfully upon happy homes—then, fell the instantaneous, simultaneous blow.

A discharge of fire-arms in the direction of the galley was heard. Each warrior of the band who had approached the vessel, leisurely picking his man and making his aim sure, had killed every sailor on board. This was the preconcerted signal; and was followed, far and wide, by discharges so close upon each other, that they seemed to make but one whole. Even as they started, and turned to observe the meaning of the first report, the white men, saving three or four, for miles, within the fort or about it, sleeping, eating, walking, working, whatever or wherever they were, fell dead before they knew what threatened them. "Such being the dispositions of the Indians, and the hour having come," says the Governor of Louisiana, in his report of the massacre, "the general assassination of the French took so little time, that the

execution of the deed and the preceding signal were almost one and the same thing. One rifle discharge closed the whole affair, with the exception of the house of *La Loire des Ursins*, in which were eight men, who defended themselves with desperation. They made good the house against the Indians the whole day. Six of them were killed, and when night came the remaining two made their escape. When the attack began, *La Loire des Ursins* happened to be on horseback, and being cut off from his house by intervening foes, he fought to death, and killed four Indians. Thus it cost the Natchez but twelve men to destroy *two-hundred-and-fifty* of ours, through the fault of the commanding officer, who alone deserved the fate which was shared by his unfortunate companions."

As for the haughty and supercilious Clopart, who had brought this calamity upon the garrison and settlement which he should have protected, his own death was sufficiently miserable. Such was the contempt which the Natchez entertained for him, that death inflicted by the hand of a warrior was thought too honorable for the white chief. None of that class laid hands on him, and the lowest among their plebeians was sent for, who beat him to death with a club, in his own garden, whither he had fled.

But to return to those in whom we are more immediately interested. Marguerite, looking up at the report of fire-arms from the galley, heard the fruitless shriek of the young wife mingled with the nearer discharge of a gun—which Rattlesnake had suddenly brought to a level and fired—and saw the merchant fall to the floor, bathed in his own blood and that of his little son, who chanced to be in the way of a deadly aim. She heard the two or three convulsive moans of the child; saw his mother lift him from the relaxing hold of her expiring husband, hug him to her breast, on her knees on the floor—all this so suddenly that she remained breathless and motionless, paralyzed by the quick horror. But when the companion of Rattlesnake, advancing, tore the dying boy from the woman's arms, which he began to pinton behind her, and she saw Rattlesnake himself coming toward her with a leather cord, with a lightning impulse she sprung to the corner of the room, where stood a gun which the

unfortunate merchant had loaded, the previous evening, to have ready in case of an emergency.

Placing her back to the wall, with her finger to the trigger of the musket, she stood at bay, her white face gleaming out of her disheveled hair, and her blue eyes fixed on those of the chief. They were no longer "laughing eyes." Even the willful savage, who had been reared to see nothing base in this black treachery and murder, felt uneasy beneath the blaze of rebuke and horror which they flashed upon him.

"Put down the gun," he said, coaxingly. "Laughing Eyes shall not be hurt. She shall be the wife of the warrior, and sew sunbeams in his tent."

She repressed the shiver that ran over her, lest it should disturb the precision of her aim. She had but one thought, to kill him. She knew that torture and death would be her punishment, that she could not hope to escape from the fate of her people, and that the incensed savage would be likely to wreak double vengeance upon her, should she harm one of their number. Better this than the other fate. A thought of Maurice steadied her hand. The chief, guessing her intention, sprung forward to wrest the gun from her grasp. As he did so, she fired. She was a second too late; the ball missed the heart for which it was destined, passing through the fleshy part of the Indian's arm, and lodging in the opposite side of the room.

"*Ah, Mon Dieu !*" she cried, in despair, seeing she had not killed him.

"Brave squaw—very brave!" said Rattlesnake, repressing all signs of pain from his wound, and even smiling.

Instead of being furious at her for the injury she had inflicted, he evidently admired her spirit; he was too proud a chief to allow himself to be provoked by a woman. The next instant, he had wrested the weapon from her weak hands, which he brought behind her back and bound with the leather cord—she was his prisoner.

With the apathy of despair she looked on at the proceedings which followed. Finding a piece of cloth which answered the purpose, Rattlesnake had his companion bandage his wounded arm, after which the two proceeded to gather up the spoils of the merchant's house. Rattlesnake had

probably calculated upon obtaining a portion with his unwilling bride, as he immediately went into the closet which contained her chest of clothing, and such trinkets and mementoes as she had brought across the sea. Opening the chest, he took out the white, embroidered dress into which Marguerite had woven so many happy thoughts and loving hopes. Holding it up, turning it round, feeling of it, and chuckling over it, he expressed the highest satisfaction with the article, which he intimated to her she should wear in his house, and to excite the envy of the Natchez maidens. There certainly was some fancy about the savage chief, for no sooner had this idea entered his head, than he signified his pleasure that it should be carried into execution. Untying her arms, he bade her strip off the dark dress which she wore, and put on this dainty apparel. She was obliged to obey him, or to submit to have him make her toilet for her; as it was, his hand put around her neck the string of gold-and-coral beads which he found; and he continued decorating the victim as long as there was a brooch or trinket in her casket. He made particular search for the beautiful floss silk and canvas with which the young girl did her embroidery, and these choice things he concealed about his own person, for fear of their falling into other hands. He was providing for the future with thrifty care.

All this time the shrieks and cries of women and children filled the air, mingled with the yells of the Indians, making a dreadful tumult. The merchant's wife, stupefied by misery, tried in vain to give any shelter to the frightened little one who clung to her dress; her arms, bound behind her, could not be used as a haven for the weeping infant. On the floor lay the dead bodies of the merchant and his boy, rudely thrust to one side by their murderers.

This scene was but one of a hundred others of equal horror. Through all the hours of that most awful day the work of pillage and destruction continued. When every article of any value had been removed from the dwellings, they were set on fire and consumed, burning up the bodies of their owners in the ruins. The rich stores of the newly-arrived galley were taken from the vessel; and as among these was a plentiful supply of brandy, as also in many other places

about the fort, the consequences upon the savages so extremely fond of the fire-water, can be imagined. Each hour their passions rose fiercer until their rejoicings became like a carnival of hell. A wagoner and a tailor were the only two men spared by the Natchez from the universal destruction; but as usual, the women and children were destined for a sad captivity. Of these, there were about three hundred. The wagoner was immediately set to work to convey the stolen goods out of the fort to the square in front of the palace of the Great Sun, where that sovereign was to make a fair distribution of the spoils among his subjects. The tailor was reserved to alter the clothing of the dead, and fit it to the new wearers. The Natchez being under the impression that all the French were destroyed throughout the land, and that there was no longer any thing to be feared from these powerful foreigners, and finding themselves more wealthy than they had ever been, with the spoils obtained of the murdered, gave themselves up to wild exhibitions of joy. While the burning and pillaging of houses was taking place, they continued to stimulate themselves with frequent draughts of the coveted fire-water.

The Eve of St. Andrew's descended darkly upon this bloody day, for those victims who were spared, more wretched than those who had found shelter in death. The Indians concluded their diabolical work by a general carousal. "They kept dancing and singing," says the historian, "until late at night, around pyramids of French heads, piled up as cannon-balls usually are in an arsenal. The agonies of the wretched women and children who witnessed the slaughter of their husbands and fathers, and who, amid the demoniacal rejoicings which followed, had to bear outrages too horrific to be related, are more easily conceived than described!"

When everything had been removed from the merchant's dwelling, and the two Indians had decked themselves out with the wearing apparel of the dead, even to the seal-ring on his finger, (over which they had quarreled,) they marched their prisoners into the street. It was fortunate for one of those prisoners that the greed of gain for the present delayed all other purposes. It being left to the sovereign of the Natchez to have the privilege of dividing the spoils, Rattlesnake

was obliged to leave Marguerite's chest, with the other furniture, upon the street, to be carted away ; but, as we have said, he made sure of those small articles which he most especially coveted, by hiding them about his person. The other savage now tied the merchant's wife to a post for safe keeping, while he went to attend to other matters, first freeing her arms that she might nurse her child. Poor babe ! the mother's milk had been poisoned in the fountain, and what it drew was tears and blood.

The last glimpse which Marguerite had of the two, was of the desolate woman, bound to the post, and trying to suckle her babe. Gladly would the two women have clung together in their misery, but the chief now signified that his prisoners must go with him.

"Let us remain in company," pleaded the young girl.

"No ! Laughing Eyes better off in her husband's wigwam. If she stays in the street, other braves will covet Rattlesnake's squaw. It's not good for her to see what's going on here. In my cabin she will be comfortable. My own mother will cook her food, and wipe away her tears. Come !"

He strode on, dragging her by the leather cord. She could only print a last kiss on the outstretched hand of her friend, and they were parted. Through hundreds of excited savages, and amidst awful scenes, the young chief led the girl, shrinking, in her misplaced finery, from the light of flashing eyes, and even from the sunshine of the calm heavens. *His* bearing was as lofty as if he had conquered a province ; he was evidently proud of his beautiful captive, and of the white robe which received more than one red stain upon its borders as she walked around and over the corpses of those who had been her acquaintance and countrymen. When they had cleared the fort, and the scenes of the principal excitement, upon entering the edge of a wood which led toward the village in which Rattlesnake resided, he untied a pony which stood ready for the purpose, lifted his companion upon its back, and walked forward rapidly, holding the horse by a rope. The distance to his home was only a little over two miles, and he was not long in passing over it. Brief as the time was, a thousand wild thoughts of escape hurried through her mind, but all so futile, so desperate, that they only served

to increase her despair. One consolation, and only one, was present with her. Among her articles of embroidery had been a fine steel bodkin or stiletto, used for piercing the eye-lets, and the bodkin was in her bosom. She had seen it, as her captor was disposing of the flosses, along with her thimble, and other implements of sewing, and she had immediately asked for the little box which held them, and he had given it to her, not dreaming of the reason for her request. With this instrument, she intended to kill herself, before she would submit to become the wife of the dreaded Indian.

The savage nature of the chief gave him no key to her thoughts. He showed unusual delicacy, for one of his race, in taking her away from the barbarous scenes transpiring at the fort, and placing her under his mother's care. He did, indeed, respect the white girl as superior to the women of his tribe; and if he could have known of the repulsive effect upon her mind of his murderous treachery, he would have taken some means to have removed her from the scene before the attack upon the fort took place. The Natchez were an intelligent people, of good minds, and he was one of their superior young men. If Marguerite had not already loved one of her own nation, and if she had not been wooed in this appalling manner, it is not improbable that time and custom would have reconciled her to her fate, for the warrior was noble-looking, and there was real politeness in his manners. Now all her soul was filled with mad loathing and horror. She shrunk from the glance of his eye with more fear than she would have done from the dangerous gaze of the reptile after which he was named. When he lifted her from the pony before the door of his house, a chill, as of ague, made her shiver so that she could hardly stand.

The abodes of the Natchez were regular houses, built of timber and mortar, each dwelling being about fifteen feet square, though lighted only by the always open entrance; they stood upon streets, as in our own villages; and some of the higher ranks had still larger houses, divided into two apartments. Before one of these more spacious edifices now stood the red chief, bringing home his bride. Pushing her into the lodge before him, he said:

"Mother, I have brought you a daughter. Treat her well."

The same withered old woman whom Marguerite recognized as having brought the proposition for her hand came forward, and said :

“ She is welcome.”

It will be remembered that the meditated attack upon the French had been kept a secret from the women, who had now just begun to hear of what was going on, and who were running from house to house, talking and gesticulating, and many of them running toward the fort. No doubt the mother of the young chief was extremely surprised ; but it did not appear in her manner. A rapid conversation in their native language took place between the two, while the new inmate stood pale and fainting on the threshold. Then the chief unpinioned her arms, led her to a block of wood which served for a seat, and fastened her ankles together in place of her wrists, that she might have the use of her hands, and with a lingering glance, as if loth to quit her, and a renewed caution to his mother to be wary of the prisoner, but to take good care of her, as his future spouse, he sprung upon the pony and galloped back to the fort, to take his share in the business transpiring there. The squaw immediately offered food and drink to her unwilling guest—consisting of a piece of roasted fowl and corn bread, and a cup of a stimulating beverage, made from the leaves of the cassia-berry tree. Poor Marguerite shook her head ; not even to conciliate her guard could she place a morsel to her lips ; her released hand clutched the stiletto hidden in her bosom, while her eyes wandered restlessly about the apartment.

There were two rooms to the dwelling, one side of each of which was occupied by a frame, running along, two feet in depth, filled with a soft, elastic texture of plaited reeds, and covered with fine, colored skins, red, yellow and black, sewed together in stripes. These were the beds of the family. Upon shelves in one corner, made of sticks and mortar, like the house, was an abundance of crockery-ware for cooking and eating purposes ; and plenty of cooked food in the dishes. The Natchez had always been in advance of the other Indian tribes in their civilization, and recently their proximity to the French had enlightened them still more. The old squaw left the provisions which she had offered her guest

sitting on the floor beside her, and withdrew to the door, where she seated herself, pretending to be engaged with making a pair of shoes, which she sewed together with a large needle or awl, made of a thin bone of the leg of a heron. But she was so engaged with the great news afloat that she hardly took a stitch in an hour. Other Indian women were continually running up, talking rapidly, and gesticulating passionately, except when staring with envy and curiosity at the lovely prisoner in her wonderful dress, "white and soft as the down of feathers, and transparent as water." It was evident to Marguerite, when she looked at them at all, that they were well pleased with what had occurred: the prospect of the rich spoils lighted up their small black eyes with glee; they gathered, chatting and screaming, around every comer from the fort, and finally the most of them went off, either to the fort, or to the village of the Great Sun, in the square of which the goods which had been seized were being piled up for distribution. It seemed to be a great hardship to the old squaw that she was detained at home by the necessity for guarding her prisoner; she grumbled about it a good deal, but stood in too much fear of her son, and was too anxious for him to keep his prize, to think of yielding to her curiosity to move about outside and see for herself what was taking place.

Once, indeed, Marguerite looked up quickly, at the sound of a familiar voice, and saw Tree-la-lu, standing with others, and looking in at her. A red flush shot up into her cheek but it faded as soon as seen; for the Indian girl gave not the least sign of ever having met her—and, indeed, the prisoner asked herself, "had she been ever so friendly, what power had she to aid her in this extremity, when not one of her own people was left alive for her to flee to, even were she released?" After a careless look into the cabin, the girl passed on with her companions, leaving Marguerite's night the darker for this lightning flash of hope.

The hours wore on. It was getting toward night, and the brief respite which she now had would soon be over. She resolved that before Rattlesnake's foot had crossed the threshold she should be beyond his power, across the dark river of death. One melancholy joy she cherished—which was that

Maurice had not arrived at the fated fort, as she had so often fondly prayed he might. Had he been present on that morning, she knew he would have fallen—that her own trials would have been none the less, but rather heightened, by seeing him torn from her arms and murdered, as had happened to the merchant's wife. She feared, still, indeed, that the universal destruction had spread as far as Natchitoches, but she did not *know*, and therefore she allowed herself to hope.

“Ah, Maurice! Maurice! you will never know how your poor little cousin followed you over the wide sea, out of love for you—you will never guess this horror which has befallen her! You will go back to France, but there will be no Marguerite there, and you will say: ‘She is false, or dead!’ and you will marry another, and be happy,” and murmuring this, tears, the first she had shed, dropped over her white cheeks to her hardly whiter dress.

As it grew toward sunset the Indian woman came in to partake of some food, and to again urge the pale-face to eat. She spoke so kindly to the weeping girl, that a sudden impulse moved Marguerite to cast herself at her feet, when she clung to the squaw's leather skirt, sobbing:

“I do not want to marry your son, nor to live among your people. Oh, will you not persuade him to let me go—to send me down to New Orleans, by the first boat that passes? You shall be rewarded—you and he. Governor Perier will pay you a handsome, a munificent ransom! I have a relative who is rich. He will send you a bag of silver dollars—hundreds of dollars! Tell me that you will persuade your son!”

“He will do as he pleases, in spite of his mother's advice,” said the woman, coldly. “I believe that his fancy is so set on the pale-face that he would not exchange her for a bag of dollars. If it was me, I would be glad of the bargain!” and she laughed.

“Can not you let me go away?” continued the girl, holding fast to the skirt which the squaw would have twitched from her; “can not you let me off, at dark, and pretend that I escaped? I would, if I reached my people in safety, give you a chest full of money.”

"I can not let you go; my son would kill me if you escaped. Besides, it is nearly dark, and he will soon be here. You need not feel so bad to marry a noble like my son. The French are cut off everywhere. They are swept away like leaves in the wood. There are none spared but the women and children. No more will come across the big waters, since the red-men have proved themselves so powerful. They will be glad to stay at home where they belong. So you may as well be content. You shall become one of us—and it is not so bad to be a Natchez."

The woman stooped, lifted Marguerite as if she had been an infant, shook her a little and then laid her down on the bed.

"You will not be fit to be married," she said, "not you. I shall make you some warm drink of herbs, and you must take it, and be more lively."

With a bitter moan the victim turned her face down against the bed, while the Indian went outside and kindled a tiny fire directly before the door, so that she had her eye constantly upon her prisoner. Over the flames she put a little earthenware stew-pan, in which she steeped some roots which she had taken from their drying-place on the wall.

When she brought the decoction to her, Marguerite was about to drink it. She felt so weak that she was afraid she should not have strength enough left to drive the little stiletto home to her heart with a sure thrust, unless she fortified herself with some stimulant. But, as she was about placing the cup to her lips, a suspicion rushed over her which made her pause. It was not that the draught was poisoned; no! she had no such *hope* as that!—it was that it might be an opiate, intended to still her nervous excitement, and compel her to sleep, whether she desired it or not. She knew that the Indians were excellent doctors, skillful in the qualities of roots and plants. This wise and cautious mother, with an eye to the health and comfort of her charge, and the approval of her son, had, doubtless, the idea of taming the wild bird which they had caged by this simple means. But Marguerite had no idea of sleeping in the tiger's lair.

"Good mother," said she, "if you would bring me the meat and bread, I would eat a little, after I have drank."

Pleased to see this symptom of submission, the squaw turned to bring the food, when, with a swift movement, the girl tossed down under the coverlet of skins into the bed, the contents of the cup. When her companion turned again, the cup was at her lips, as if she were draining the last drop.

"The drink was good; now I will eat."

The woman chuckled as she received back the empty vessel.

"Yes, it is good. It will make you like the Natchez better—by-and-by. It will hang stones on the lids of Laughing Eyes, and she will dream of the spirit-land."

This speech confirmed the suspicion of the prisoner that it was intended as an opiate. In order to convince the squaw that she had drank the draught, she thought best to affect drowsiness, and after swallowing a few mouthfuls of food, finally closed her eyes as if asleep, though never had she been so thoroughly awake in her life as through these trying moments. Every nerve quivered; her hearing was preternaturally acute; it seemed as if she could see, through her closed-eyelids, the sun going down, before the open door, and the twilight creeping on—she heard the far-away tumult, and the sound of every foot which went up and down the street. With her motionless hand clutching the stiletto in her bosom, white and still as if dead and wrapped in her shroud, instead of a bride in her wedding-dress—she forced herself to breathe deeply and evenly. Twice or thrice the squaw came up and looked at her, but her lashes did not tremble, and finally the old woman took up her seat in the door—and Marguerite lay there, in her feigned sleep, grasping the stiletto, and listening for the step of Rattlesnake.

CHAPTER VII.

LITTLE BIRD.

DARKNESS was creeping over the earth, and the Indian women were keeping their part of the festival of death, by kindling huge bonfires in the square; the tumult, both near and far, increased with the going down of the sun.

Marguerite, lying there on Rattlesnake's bed, like a corpse, presently heard another woman conversing with the one in the door. She knew the voice to be that of Little Bird; she heard every syllable the two said, but it being in Indian, she could not understand it. Presently, Little Bird began to talk in her broken French, which the squaw also spoke. Marguerite felt certain that this was done on purpose that she might be informed of something.

"I have been down to the fort," said Tree-la-lu. "The men have drunk so much brandy, and now they are dancing and singing about the heads of the French. They will be all very drunk before they get through."

"I wish my son would hasten and bring me some of the fire-water," grumbled the other. "I am tired of stopping here, away from the fun."

"Your son has drank too much fire-water already, for his good. He will not be home these six hours; not even to see his wife. Is she asleep?"

"As sound as a bear in winter," laughed the squaw. "She will sleep till he comes back, if it be not till to-morrow. She is tired out. Bah! I do not like to stay moping here watching her."

"If she is so sound asleep, she will not need watching," said Little Bird. "It is too bad that you have been here all day, and such sights to be seen. At least you can come over to the great square and see the heaps of good things—the clothes, and furniture, and fine things, which are to be given to us all. It will take but a little while."

"If she should get away," replied the other, doubtfully, "my son would not forget it. He would kill me in his anger."

"They've got a beautiful mirror over there, out of the white chief's room, that you can see yourself in. All the women are there. Come, it is foolish to fear any thing. Your son will not be at home for much time. He can not leave the war-dance. He will never find out if you go away a little time. And the pale-face is sound asleep."

"That is true," yielded the squaw, "and her feet are bound together tight. If she should awake she could not walk—"

"And where would she go if she did? Bah! come along. You ought to see yourself in the bright water, set around in a frame, which we have there. I suppose the Great Sun will take that to his own palace."

Unable to withstand this persuasion, the mother of Rattlesnake arose, and after a searching look at her motionless captive, went away with her companion. Little Bird had gone but a few paces when she found she had dropped her bundle of colored porcupine quills, with which she was embroidering a pair of leggins, and ran back to find it. It was not outside the door, and entering the cabin, she sprung to the side of the bed, shook Marguerite, crying, in a low voice:

"Wake—wake!"

"I am awake; I have been all the time."

"Here is a knife. When we have been gone a little time, cut the cords about your feet. It will be dark. Rise up and look out. If no one is near, run like the deer, three cabins to the left. There will be a white cloth against the door, lest you mistake. Go in, and get into my bed. I will come to you there before the moon sets."

The next instant she was back on the street, holding up her bundle of quills to prove that she had found them.

No, it was no dream. The knife was in Marguerite's hand, and she had heard, not imagined, those words. For a moment she was blind and deaf with the rush of blood through her frame; but with hope came strength and steadiness. She waited impatiently perhaps ten minutes. Then rising, she cut asunder the bonds which chained her. Stealing to the door, she found that it was quite dark, except a dim light from the young and clouded moon; that part of the village appeared deserted. Further off, large bonfires were burning, and as their light flashed fitfully up, she was afraid that some

sudden glare of flame would betray her, by her white robe, if she ventured forth. She would have given the world for a dress of skins, like Little Bird's. But even as she stood hesitating, the slender chance for escape might pass, never to return. With a prayer in her wild and hurried thoughts, she glided out and along, meeting not a living soul; all were enticed away from that neighborhood by the cunning Little Bird. "Three houses to the left," she whispered, and as she saw a white rag fluttering from the doorway of the cabin designated, she stole in. All was dark and silent there. The place was empty. Groping her way to the wall, she felt for the bed. As she put her hand on it, she became aware of some more of Little Bird's cunning. We have described the beds of the Natchez to be frames two feet in height, filled in with woven rushes. The rushes had been removed from Tree-la-lu's couch, so as to leave a space within the frame sufficiently large to accommodate the person of Marguerite, who perceived instantly what was intended, and creeping into the cavity, drew the rushes over her, and laid trembling in her nest.

A little later, several women passed, on their way home to their cabins, among them the mother of Rattlesnake, hurrying back to her charge guiltily, like a child which has run away without leave—in such subjection were the females of the Natchez to their lords and masters. Little Bird lingered at her door, chatting and laughing in apparent carelessness, for a moment, before coming in; then she went up to her bed, and reaching her hand down in the reeds, whispered:

"Art thou here?"

She received no answer, but her hand came in contact with the person of the fugitive, and she had only time to receive this assurance when the old squaw came flying back, shrieking:

"The white bird has flown away! What shall I do? My son will kill me!"

"Flown away!" exclaimed Tree-la-lu, in the greatest surprise. "Ha! how can that be, unless she is a spirit? Were not her feet bound? Haste—haste—haste! Let us light the rushes and look about. She can not have fled far. Come—come! Let us tell every one to help us!"

"Come! come! haste! haste!" cried the old Indian; and such a tumult did she arouse, that shortly the whole village was in an intense commotion.

Torches of dried reed were hastily lighted, and every cabin searched. The zeal of the women was immense, lest this poor white victim should escape from her tormentors. When the huts had been searched, they rushed to and fro in every direction, through and about the village, sending messengers to the other villages to report the loss. Not even Rattlesnake's mother was so vigorous in her exertions as Little Bird, who was outraged that so fine a warrior as Rattlesnake should be robbed of the wife he had so bravely captured.

Little Bird's mother was dead, and her father was down at the fort with her brothers, so that her house was at present empty; she lighted her torch, and had it thoroughly examined among the first, even to drawing the cover of skins off her couch; and she it was who gradually hinted, after every effort had proven vain, that the pale-face captive must have been a supernatural being, who had soared up to the skies in her white robes, and been changed into one of the silver clouds which were driving across the sky. This idea made a deep impression on the superstitious listeners, always ready to give a supernatural explanation of any thing mysterious or unaccountable.

It also gave comfort to the old woman, who immediately resolved to save her own neck by swearing to her son that the pale-face had risen off her couch, and gone up through the roof to the sky, and that she had seen her do it; that she tried to hold her back by catching one of her feet as she was going up, but that she could no more hold her than she could hold the mist which rises over the river of cool nights, and that, in her opinion, her son had better give over trying to make a wife of a silver witch that could fly into a cloud whenever she pleased, and be content with a sensible, industrious girl, like Little Bird, whom any one could see, with half an eye, was partial to him. Little Bird agreed to confirm her story, and to conceal from him the fact that his mother had left the house; other women, also, who knew of her visit to the great square, promised to keep silence on the subject, for the weaker sex of the Natchez being constantly

under the heel of the stronger, felt it perfectly proper to take any little advantage of their situation which they could gain by duplicity. It was judged best, however, to dispatch a messenger to Rattlesnake to warn him of what had transpired.

The excitement having a little subsided, Tree-la-lu took occasion to ascertain the condition of the pale-face whom she had so daringly taken in charge. Receiving no answer to her whispered questions, she felt of Marguerite, and at first supposed she was dead; but upon lifting her up, and chafing her wrists and heart, which she was obliged to do in the dark, for fear of prying eyes, she soon perceived tokens of reviving consciousness.

So terribly had the emotions of the last twenty-four hours worn upon Marguerite, and so great was the change from the despair of a few moments ago to the present relief, if not hope, that no sooner had she found herself in this grave, as it were, shut out from the horrible vision of Rattlesnake's return, than she sunk into insensibility. If she *had* been dead, Little Bird would not have been sorry. Her kindness to her rival was not out of love for her, but jealousy; it was to thwart the young chief, not to serve the pale-face, that she ran such risks. After thoroughly rubbing Marguerite, and making her drink some brandy and water, she pressed into her hand a piece of corn-cake, restored the reeds lightly, so as not to obstruct the air, leaving a comfortable breathing-space around her face, whispered:

"Sleep—do not fear—sleep and rest. You will need rest;" and went back to her watch in the door.

Sitting there in the night, gazing now at the stars, and now at the fires gleaming in the distance, and at the red glare of the flames from the dwellings in the fort, coloring the sky with the light as of blood, the fierce heart of the Indian girl exulted in the thought of the disappointment of the man she loved. Sooner than he should have had the pale-face, she herself would have plunged the knife into her rival's heart.

Marguerite, lying there, thinking grateful thoughts of the Natchez girl, would have shuddered in her stifling hiding-place could she have read her heart. It was no kindness to herself which had excited those efforts in her behalf.

Little Bird was as wily as she was passionate; she would

have murdered the pale-face rather than have seen her in the cabin of Rattlesnake; but such an act as this would have roused his ire, so that she would have lost all chance of becoming attractive in his eyes, after the other was out of the way. Her game was, not only to deprive him of the white girl, but to insinuate herself into the place now held by Marguerite. She felt that the white girl was an intruder; that she had no right to a place by the home-fire of the red chief; that she, Little Bird, ought to cook the food and rear the children of her chosen warrior. Had he not worn her belt, before his head was turned by the sight of that lily-faced thing? Did not red blood run in his veins and in hers? And was it not good blood? Did not the Natchez hate the French? And if so, why should the sons of Rattlesnake be poisoned by the interfusion of the detested blood with that of the Natchez? Had he not returned her belt to her, after he had worn it nearly a whole moon? Should she bear the insult? Was it not meet that she should laugh at this little revenge of hers?

Questions like these burned hotly in her heart, as she sat there, her chin resting in her hands, her eyes flashing, her lips quivering, the passions of her breast flaming over her face at intervals, as the light of the distant fort flamed up by fits and starts from the smoldering ruins. The hands upon which her chin rested were clenched until the nails pierced the skin. Occasionally a shriek of agony from some tortured and despairing white woman would pierce the air. The sound only made her smile. It was as much music to her ears as the dying cry of the fawn to the hunter. It was plain that Marguerite owed her present safety to no love of Little Bird for the French race.

The women were jabbering and gesticulating through the streets; a little to the west lay the sluggish waters of the Mississippi, reddened by the glow of burning houses; to the north, a vast wood stretched away in darkness and silence; but the village itself was on a grassy plain, sloping gently down to the river, and in the lee of the wilderness.

While Little Bird sat in the door, she heard the voice of Rattlesnake in fierce altercation with his mother. She had sent a messenger to inform him of the disappearance of his

prisoner, and he had immediately left the hellish carnival at the fort, and ran home, maddened with blood and brandy, to ascertain the state of the case. The shrill pitch to which their voices were raised enabled her to overhear all that passed. The old woman, shaking in her shoes, and knowing that her life depended upon the energy with which she lied, asseverated that she had not left the white girl for a moment; that she gave her drinks to make her sleep; but that the pale maiden, as it grew dark, floated up to the roof of the cabin; that she screamed out, and tried to drag her back by her silver dress, but that she went through the roof like smoke, and when she ran out to see what happened, she saw nothing but a white cloud that hovered a few moments over the cabin, and then floated up to the moon.

"And if you don't credit your mother's word, who has nursed you at her breast, and carried you on her back, ask Little Bird. She will tell you that my words are true as the sun which ever rises at the appointed hour."

"Little Bird—ha! that devil!" cried Rattlesnake, with a suspicious tone. "You have made this up between you. She is jealous and sullen. Ugh! I will have you both roasted."

"The doves in the woods are not so gentle as Tree-la-lu. That you know, my son. She happened to be passing the house as I ran out. I called to her, and she saw the silver mist, like smoke, arise and hover over the roof, and sail off to the moon. Ask her."

The next instant Rattlesnake faced the girl where she sat in her door. A large bonfire which had just been kindled in the village lighted up the air so as to reveal each to the other as distinctly as in the daylight. Her soul trembled within her body, as she met the fiery and searching glance of his glittering eye; for a second, her lips quivered; she knew that he suspected her, and it seemed to her as if that knife-like glance cut her heart open and laid it bare to his inspection. A consciousness that the least sign of guilt would be fatal to her hopes, stilled the tremor of her lashes; she lifted her dark, melancholy eyes closely to his. Rage, liquor, and the horrible excitements of the day had changed the handsome and stately chief to the likeness of Lucifer himself. Disfigured with the

red war-paint, his garments smeared with blood, half a dozen scalps dangling from his belt, his gory knife grasped in his hand, he was more frightful than the native cougar of those plains, for to the ferocity of the beast was added the intelligence of man. Yet to the maiden who gazed upon him he was then an object of the greatest admiration.

"Where is Laughing Eyes?"

"There," was her quiet reply, pointing to a single light cloud which floated off in the western sky.

"You lie!"

"If the heart of the brave prompts him to insult and injure Little Bird, so be it," answered she. "He says true—she is a liar."

"I am not a fool," rejoined the brave. "I know that the French maiden had no more wings than a Natchez. It is impossible that she should fly away. You are tying bark over my eyes."

"You are not blinded by the bark, ha! Well, look for yourself. Your eyes are sharp—find her."

Angered by this taunt, he struck the girl across the cheek with the flat of his knife, a blow that sent her reeling out of the door and brought the blood. The inside of the hut was lighted by the bonfire, so that its contents were easily discernible. Striding in, he examined the apartment carefully. Some disorder about the bed attracted his attention. Going to it, he searched about it in a manner to make the heart of Little Bird bound into her throat. He pulled the cover quite off and flung it on the floor, but discovering nothing, he, half in spite and half in suspicion, thrust his long knife down into the woven rushes. Then, indeed, Little Bird screamed aloud; but when he asked her what was the matter, she said that a serpent had run over her foot and alarmed her.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WHITE SPIRIT.

THE destruction of the fort was followed by days of riotous feasting and excesses. The Natchez felt perfectly secure, for they believed, at first, that the French were all destroyed, everywhere in the land, as they probably would have been, had not the daring hand of the Indian girl removed the sticks from the bundle in the temple, thus destroying the concert of action agreed upon. The provisions from the warehouses, and the goods of all kinds taken from the houses and from the galley, enriched the depredators beyond any thing they had ever before hoped. Their passion for fire-water, and their hatred of labor, except where labor was necessary, plunged them all for a time into daily carousals. But after a few days, they set themselves to work, with intelligence and activity, to avail themselves to the utmost of the successes they had obtained. One of the first steps taken, was to plot an assault upon the only French stronghold supposed to be left in the land.

St. Denis, a man celebrated in the early history of Louisiana, and whose life was as romantic as the wildest dreams of fiction, was at that time commander of the distant fort at Natchitoches. It was in his service that Maurice Cantarelle was engaged. Here St. Denis had made himself so popular that he led the life of a small, half-barbaric, half-civilized potentate. For hundreds of miles around that settlement, the Indians had submitted to his sway, and had readily acknowledged him as their great chief. He settled authoritatively all the disputes arising among the different tribes, ruling over them as if he had been born an Indian, and been their natural sovereign. The Natchez feared him more than any thing else, and knowing his daring and indomitable energy, had no doubt that, upon hearing of the slaughter of his countrymen, he would march against their assassins at the head of a large number of formidable Texan warriors, among which would be many of the feared and renowned Comanches. They

prudently resolved to anticipate this blow by organizing a secret expedition, which should travel swiftly and silently to the vicinity of Natchitoches and there fall upon the fort, before St. Denis suspected their purpose. To fulfill this important plot, a hundred and fifty of their bravest warriors were selected.

The leader of this expedition was Rattlesnake. He was young to be allowed to hold so important a post, but his prowess had already made him so conspicuous that warriors older than himself felt it no disgrace to be placed beneath him. In the council-chamber, when the plan had been broached, he had at once expressed himself eager to undertake it, and had offered himself as the leader.

During all the feasting which had been progressing, the young chief had been morose and abstemious. Totally unlike his former character was the deep melancholy into which he was plunged. The old squaws of the tribe whispered together about him, that he was under a spell; that he had been bewitched by the beautiful pale-face, who had gone off to the moon, and taken the brave's spirit and courage away with her. Some had openly laughed aloud, and said that Rattlesnake was becoming a woman. He had heard this disgraceful taunt without ever resenting it. Truly, thought his old mother, as she watched him, that Laughing Eyes had wrought a dangerous spell upon her son. She had repeated the story of the white maiden's rising through the roof like smoke so often, that she was now herself convinced of it. She could hardly see a wreath of vapor, that she did not shriek aloud with fear, or watch it with superstitious awe. Rattlesnake himself was regarded with awe by many, as a person under the influence of magic.

He sneered bitterly to himself at this idea which his people had. He knew that the only magic upon him was the magic power of the Laughing Eyes for whose escape he so silently lamented. He had been so certain of his prize, and had set his wild affections so fast upon her, that he could not brook the disappointment. He would not even cheer himself with the plentiful fire-water. Day by day, when others had been rioting, he had roamed the woods alone, or lingered about the ruins of the dwelling in which Laughing Eyes had once

resided. He would stand in the street, upon the spot where he had first encountered her sparkling glance, and fancy that he saw her still. The poor merchant's young wife had sunk and died under the hardships and indignities to which she was exposed; and Rattlesnake had bought her infant of the people who held it, and taken it to his own home, to be reared by his mother. The sight of the child was dear to him, because it was associated in his memory with the white maiden upon whom his imagination and passion had become so strongly settled.

As we have said, when the expedition to Natchitoches was proposed, the young warrior shook off the stupor which had weighed upon him, and sprung to his feet with erect form and gleaming eye. He longed for an opportunity to forget his grief in the fierce excitement of battle. Although not by any means thoroughly convinced that Laughing Eyes had disappeared in the manner his mother stated, he had abandoned all hopes of her being in that vicinity. Either she had stolen away to the woods or the river, or she had indeed been mysteriously reconveyed to the sky from which she seemed to have fallen. Remembering her visit to the river the night before the attack on the fort, he thought it not improbable that she had again attempted flight by means of the stream. His heart burned with jealousy as he pictured her the prisoner of some more fortunate warrior of some tribe lower down the river; for he knew that if she had attempted the passage of the Mississippi to New Orleans, that she must have fallen into the hands of the Indians. Now, when he heard of Natchitoches, he remembered that it was at that place resided the cousin of Marguerite—the rival who had prevented the success of his own suit. This was the great secret of his eagerness. To find out and mark that man for the vengeance of his own hand was the purpose which animated him. A vague suggestion, too improbable to be really a thought, floated in his mind in connection with the other fixed idea: it was, that if Laughing Eyes had, by any possibility, escaped, her effort would be to reach her cousin, and that perhaps he should not only kill her lover, but regain the girl. All these powerful motives were more than enough to arouse him from his apathy, and make him once more the brilliant chief, fitted to

inspire his men. The preparations were quickly made; plenty of ammunition and guns had been gained by the seizure of the fort; the necessary shoes and provisions were as easily provided, and one wild and stormy midnight, when the chill rains of December were falling, the band of warriors set forth on their journey.

Entering a number of canoes provided for the purpose, they paddled silently up the stream, intending to keep to the river until about daybreak, then to send the boats back by men whom they had brought along with that object, and to start across the country for Natchitoches, which lay a little over a hundred miles to the west. In order to keep themselves from the observation of other tribes, who might act as spies and informers, they resolved to travel mostly by night, except where the land was so thickly wooded as to give shelter to their movements. They had been about three hours upon the water, swiftly pushing themselves along against the current, maintaining as perfect silence among themselves as if they were in the neighborhood of an enemy, such being their cautious habit; the rain fell more heavily than ever, almost flooding the narrow dug-outs in which they crouched; the wind whistled down the river, and now, as the storm began to beat more wildly, the lightning flashed at quick intervals. One moment there would be impenetrable darkness, the next every object would be lighted up with a vivid brightness, showing the frothy water, the dripping paddles, the dark shores lined with gloomy pines or stretching up in low bluffs.

Rattlesnake was in a canoe with half a dozen of his chosen braves. Although an expert in the use of the paddle, he had allowed the canoe to drop behind, for his thoughts were busy with the details of the work before him. Suddenly, he sprung to his feet with an abruptness which nearly capsized the frail bark; his friends gazed upon him in wonder as the transient lightning revealed his extended arm, his finger pointing down the stream, his face blanched, his eyes opened as in terror or surprise, while the wild wind blew his long hair and his deer-skin mantle back from his tall form.

"Look! look!" he cried, in a low, excited voice.

They stared hard in the direction he had indicated, but

they saw nothing, for the blackness of the night was upon all things.

"I see her! I see her!" he murmured, in an intense whisper.

They continued to gaze until the next flash of light lit up the scene, but nothing more revealed itself than they had seen before.

Rattlesnake sat down, pressing his hand upon his heart.

"I saw her," he muttered, "it was no delusion. She followed us upon the waters. She was standing in a little canoe; her white dress floated back like the sails of the strange ships, her beautiful hair rippled on the wind. By the fire of the sky I saw her as plainly as I saw my mother's face yesterday."

"It must have been a vision," the warrior nearest him ventured to say. "She has come down from the moon to follow us, and warn her people of our intentions. I am afraid it is a bad sign."

"Ay," spoke the others, "it is an evil omen. She will befriend the French. But let us say nothing about it to our brothers, lest it depress their spirits and make them less daring."

A feeling of awe crept over the party. They would have rushed into the fiercest battle with savage joy, or have endured the tortures of the stake without the contortion of a muscle, but they were afraid of that which they could not understand. The elements were haunted to them by mysterious powers; each one strained his eyes to catch the flutter of that silver robe through the wildness of the storm.

For another hour they sat in silence, plying their paddles diligently to keep up with the convoy, while the thunder seemed to shake the water as well as the air with its heavy vibrations. Rattlesnake's eyes were never removed from looking down the stream.

"Ha! it is she—again!" he cried at last, but before the others could follow his gaze the darkness had once more enveloped all.

The next instant a succession of quivering flashes kept the earth aglow for nearly half a minute, and then all saw what their leader had seen—a vision of the beautiful pale-face,

standing erect in a tiny bark, paddling against the current, which seemed not to weigh a feather against her. She was all white, except her streaming hair, her face and neck being as colorless as the robe she wore. Though she held a paddle in her hands, it seemed to the warriors that her boat moved of itself, it shot along so lightly and swiftly.

It was but a brief time they had for observation; when the lightning flashed again, there was nothing to be seen of the spirit-canoe and its spirit-occupant. Presently the storm broke up, and through the scattering clouds could be seen the faint flush of approaching day. It was time to land, and return the canoes upon their homeward way. This was soon done. The spot chosen for the landing was a low bank leading into a forest of pine. The guide to the expedition had been across the country twice, and knew how to pursue the route, to avoid the most hardships, and to maintain the safety of the band. After they had penetrated a few miles into the interior, they halted in a little sheltered valley where there was a stream of water. It was now broad daylight; they stopped to breakfast on the dried venison which they carried with them, and as the brushwood was so wet with the rain, they warmed themselves with fire-water in place of fire-wood. Then the company set their guard, and lay down to rest for a few hours, purposing to resume their march when it grew toward night.

Rattlesnake did not improve this opportunity to recruit his strength for the coming fatigues. Saying that he would go off a little way and spy about for any lurking enemy, he withdrew from the valley; but instead of skirting the vicinity, as he had said, he retraced his steps to the river. There was an impression on his mind which he wished, if possible, to verify or dismiss. Upon reaching the spot at which the boats had landed, he looked intently up and down the river; but from the accent of impatience which he uttered, it would seem that he did not obtain what he wished. Next he commenced a careful investigation of the shore, up and down, for some rods from the central part.

"Ha!" he at length exclaimed, bending over something which he had detected in the bend of the shore. When he raised his head again, a glow of satisfaction and triumph

lighted his face. He had made a discovery. There were marks made by a canoe in landing and being shoved off; and from these marks fresh footsteps led away up the bank and into the forest. These imprints were light enough to be a child's, and they were evidently those of a white child or woman, for they were turned out, and were made by one who wore French shoes.

If indeed he had seen Laughing Eyes following on the river through the night, and these were now her footsteps which he was tracking, any one would have sworn that the poor girl would have had a slender chance of escape, for a panther would not be more subtle nor more powerful than this wild creature on the trail of the game which had once eluded him. Eagerly he followed the plainly visible imprints which there had been no attempt at hiding, and which the soft mud molded so deeply, up into the grass of the bank, and along into the woods, their pathway still marked by the rain which had been brushed from the bushes and grass in passing. He followed on for half a mile, growing more eager at every step, though the trail began to be more indistinct; presently he lost it altogether for a little way, and then came upon it where it had turned and returned toward the river. It was now very distinct again. At that moment he caught the flutter of something white behind a tree. Creeping up stealthily, he was about to make a sudden grasp at his prize, when an arch, provoking laugh rung out, and the person stepped from behind the tree. It was Little Bird.

"You take much trouble to catch me, when I could be caught at home as easy as a tame chicken," she said, still laughing.

Rattlesnake's eyes glanced quickly in every direction; but the girl was positively alone, and there had been but one track. His disappointment made him furious.

"What are you doing here, fool?" he said, scornfully.

Little Bird's eyes flashed fire. It was not often that a Natchez woman gave a look like that to one of the master-sex; but her spirit had never been so thoroughly broken as the most of her meek companions were. She had loved the young chief with all humility, ready to bear his coldness, his indifference, his blows, even; but these accents of contempt

stung her beyond endurance. Her love turned suddenly to bitterness.

"Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned."

The love which would endure all for its object, would endure as much for revenge, when turned to hate. Her breast heaved high, her fingers worked together; for a moment her lips quivered, as she tried to answer; but mastering herself, she bent her eyes on the ground, that he might not see the anger which was in them, and said, gently:

"I know it is wrong, and that Tree-la-lu is indeed a fool, but her heart urged her to follow after her chief, that perchance, if he should be wounded in battle, she might be near to take care of him."

"Bah! you have no sense. Do you expect to keep up with warriors on the war-path? We will not be bothered with women. Go back."

"Tree-la-lu will not annoy the brave chiefs; she will keep modestly far behind, only that she may sometimes see, with her own eyes, that her lord is well; and if he should be killed, that she may thrust an arrow into her heart and die upon his body."

"You are as silly as an owl," grumbled the chief, a little more complacently, for he could not be entirely insensible to the flattery of a love so devoted as this. "But how did this trail-of the French come here?" and he pointed to the foot-steps which had led him there.

Little Bird laughed again, and thrust out her feet, which were cased in shoes, once the property of some poor victim of the massacre.

"You fancied that you saw Laughing Eyes on the river last night," she said, with a swift glance at him. "I knew you would fancy it, and that you would return to the river. That is why I wore these shoes, and why I twisted this piece of white cloth about me. It was Tree-la-lu whom you saw in the canoe by the fire of the sky. Laughing Eyes is beyond us, in the spirit-land. Why mourn for her, since she has gone? Will you never again be content with the love of a maiden of your own race?" Her voice grew liquid, her eye soft.

"I am sure that I saw the French girl," said Rattlesnake, gloomily.

"I tell you it was Tree-la-lu, wrapped in this cloth. If you saw any thing else, it must have been the soul of the pale-face guiding my canoe through the storm. She knew that I loved you, perhaps."

"I must return to my band," said Rattlesnake, abruptly. "Go home. I shall kill the white chief, but I shall not be harmed. I shall need no women to nurse me."

He stalked away in the direction of the encampment, vexed beyond words at this termination of his adventure. He would not even once turn his head to find if Little Bird was following, though he suspected that such would be her course. Reaching the valley, he threw himself on the ground for an hour's sleep. Late in the afternoon the party began again to move forward through the dim recesses of the pine woods. It seemed to Rattlesnake, as he strode moodily along, as if the solemn murmur of the pines was the whisper of the white girl's spirit; and many times, through the following night, as he followed the guide, by the light of the full moon, gleaming in broken patches through the forest-arches, the white spots of moonlight looked like the fluttering of her bridal dress. He knew now, certainly, that Tree-la-lu was on the march, though she kept out of sight of the band, and did not intrude herself at all upon his notice.

When morning broke, the expedition was out of the bleak pine wilderness upon wide and softly-rolling prairies, stretching away in boundless magnificence. They could see immense herds of bisons grazing here and there, while multitudes of birds rose out of the grass and circled about in short flights. It was glorious hunting-ground. The dark blood surged up into the cheeks of Rattlesnake and his warriors; their hearts burned for their swift horses, their arrows and their lassoes, that they might dart away over the plains, and hurl their weapons at the noble game. But they were on the war-path, painted for the deadly work of another kind, and they would have been false to their training, and the lessons of their fathers, if they had tarried by the way. Judging by the perfect composure of the bisons, far and near, that no Indians of other tribes were hunting there at present, they ventured to shoot a deer and some birds for their breakfast, and to kindle a fire for roasting them. This done, and their

half-raw food disposed of, again they caught a few hours' sleep, concealed by the tall grass of the prairie from any chance travelers.

Thus the band continued for four or five days, observing greater caution as they neared the French post, and making the latter part of their journey entirely by night. The nearer the approach to Natchitoches the more eager and restless was Rattlesnake. All the superstition of his nature had been wrought upon by things which he had observed by the way—ill-omens pursued him—he was convinced that the pale-faced maiden was hovering near, intent upon giving the alarm to St. Denis, so that, as they encamped one night under the walls of the fort, he was not surprised to observe, with the quickness of an Indian's perception, that his approach had been discovered.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CAPTIVE AT THE STAKE.

It was night in the encampment of the Natchez. They had met with the spies of St. Denis on the previous day, who had given them to know that their approach was expected at the fort. There was, therefore, no further necessity for caution, nor for the night attack with which they had expected to surprise the garrison. The warriors had therefore lain down in the latter part of the night, to be prepared for the duties of the morrow. Only Rattlesnake was entirely sleepless. The responsibility which rested upon him was too great for him to forget it in slumber. His mind was busy with schemes for over-matching the vigilant and indomitable French chief with whom he had to combat. He was aware that unless he could obtain some advantage by stratagem, there was small prospect of taking the fort.

And even in the midst of these important reflections, his thoughts were disturbed by the image of Laughing Eyes. Things had occurred to awake his suspicions; yet, wary and keen as he was, he could not detect the secret of what was

passing near him, without his knowledge. Of one thing he was convinced—that Little Bird was playing a double part, and that she had some object besides affection for him in following him in this rough and perilous journey. He believed that either she was attached to the French, and had come with the purpose of betraying her people to them, or that she knew more of the disappearance of the pale-face than she chose to reveal. Several times he had returned upon his path, during the journey, and had come upon her in the most unexpected manner; yet silent and slyly as he had dropped behind, (sometimes lying behind a tree or fallen log until she came up and passed him by,) he had never discovered any thing to confirm his suspicions. She was always alone, trudging patiently along, and she, when he would spring at her from his hiding-place, would betray neither guilt nor alarm.

Once only had he seen in the distance, between the branches of the undergrowth, the motion of some white object; and when he would have rushed forward to examine it, Little Bird had clung to his arm in terror, declaring it to be a ghost, with which he must not trouble himself. She had seen it often she said, and when she would draw near it, it would vanish into air; and so, indeed, did this white object, whatever it was, for when the chief had shaken off the trembling girl and sought to find what he had seen, there was nothing in the underbrush but the wind sighing.

Now, as he lay on the ground, thinking these matters over, and affecting sleep, it occurred to him that it was no more than prudent to find out what Little Bird might be doing. The bare possibility that she might be treacherous to her own people was enough to fill him with anger at one whose best efforts at pleasing him were only fortunate enough to secure his dislike. The sentries, who were posted for fear of a surprise from St. Denis, were on the alert; but he thought it best to be sure, by personal observation, that all was right. Arising from his couch with so light a tread as not to disturb the repose of his slumbering braves, he passed the sentries with a whispered word that he was going out to reconnoiter the enemy. With a step softer than that of the cat he made the circuit of the camp. He did not find Little Bird where

he had expected that she would be, sleeping near enough to the party to be under their protection in case of an attack. This surprised him, and he resolved to find out where she was. The moon now rose very late; it was long past midnight, and her waning crescent was just rising beyond the fort. Taking a path which led in the direction of the fort, he crept along, gliding from tree to tree, silent as death, avoiding even the little patches of moonlight, keeping in the deepest shadow, but searching about with sharp eyes for the least movement of a living object. This caution was rendered necessary by the consideration of his own safety, so near the enemy, as well as from the desire not to alarm the person upon whose track he supposed himself to be.

Almost absolute as was the control which the Indian had over the expression of his emotions, he nearly uttered a cry, when, suddenly, only a little in advance of him, he heard the snapping of a dry twig, and saw two figures glide out into the path where the moonlight glimmered faintly, and lose themselves again in the shadow. Brief as the glimpse had been, he knew them both—they were Little Bird and Laughing Eyes! Quick as a flash of lightning came the understanding of the whole mystery—that jealousy had prompted Tree-la-lu to secrete her rival, and that, not daring to dispose of her in any other way, at the prospect of this expedition, she had consented for the white girl to attempt to reach her lover, by means of following, at a little distance, on the trail of the warriors. He could not but admire the boldness of the scheme—and when he remembered the caution of Little Bird, who had never allowed the white girl to be in her company, but who, after his first discovery of her, had pretended that *she* was following him, he whispered to himself that Little Bird was a smart woman, after all, and almost worthy to be a man and a warrior. He no longer believed that she had intended going the whole distance, but had attempted to get the French girl safely on her journey, when, finding that he only suspected something from discovering their canoe by the flashes of lightning, she had adapted her case to meet the emergency. Rack his Indian wit as he might, he still could not conceive where Laughing Eyes had been at that time when he first tracked and surprised her guide. However, he

was amply satisfied now to have them both within his grasp, one to be reserved for the fate he had once before marked out for her, the other for punishment.

Stealthily as the serpent after whom he was named, he glided behind the two girls, who appeared to be making their way to the fort. The gleam of Marguerite's white dress enabled him easily to keep on their track. With a curiosity to see what their purpose was he forebore to lay hands on his prey until they had emerged from the woods and began to run lightly across the open fields which lay about the fort. Then, with the silent spring of the panther, he had the pale-face in his arms, his hand pressed over her mouth to smother the scream which rose to her lips.

Oh, God! this was a horrible moment for Marguerite Cantarelle. When she had suffered so long, had borne every misery but the worst, had made that weary and desperate journey, dragging her faint steps to keep up with the stride of warriors, the chill dews of the winter nights drenching her light garments, her shoes worn from her bleeding feet—had endured the fear of betrayal, the acute suspense—had strained every nerve to its utmost tension to comprehend and execute the subtle cautions of her guide—now, *now*, when the fort was in sight, when she could fancy that she saw her lover through its walls, when she felt his protecting arm closing about her—when her heart, which had been cold for weeks, was beginning to throb in her bosom beneath the warmth of hope—now, to feel the relentless grasp of that thwarted chief, to be stabbed by the glittering triumph of his eye, was too much. He need not have pressed his hand over her mouth so closely; for after the first impulse to shriek, she had fainted, and hung limp as her own soiled robes, over his shoulder.

“Ha! the serpent is more cunning than the dove,” exclaimed Little Bird, after standing confounded by this sudden disaster.

“He will never forgive me now,” was her next thought; “I have lost all my trouble which I have taken for that hated pale-face. But he shall not have her; no, I will kill them both first,” and creeping into the thickest part of the forest, she laughed aloud, maliciously, as if she dared the chief to

exercise power over her. He could make no effort to arrest her, with his present burden, and of the two he had rather that Little Bird should escape. He knew of no harm that she could do, at this late hour, and he rather considered her a good riddance.

Great was the surprise of the awakening warriors when the French girl was borne into their encampment. Many were at first afraid of her, persisting in believing her a spirit, but Rattlesnake assured them that she had followed them all this distance in the hopes of reaching her people, and that he was glad of it, for he could make her an important consideration in his negotiations with the French.

When the poor girl recovered her senses she found herself tightly bound to a tree and watched over by a guard.

It was now getting daylight. The day was to be a momentous one. Rattlesnake was in the highest spirits—battle and victory first, and afterward the wooing of his pale-face wife. His strategic mind saw at once that he could turn the presence of the French girl in his camp into an immense advantage. It required but a short council with his warriors to decide upon the course of action.

Lies and duplicity, as usual, were the things relied on. He proposed that they should send a deputation with the calumet of peace, to inform St. Denis that they had come with the most friendly intentions—that they had lately had some difficulties with the French settled in their neighborhood, and that they wished to make him their arbiter, knowing his great wisdom and discretion, in the settlement of their affairs. In proof of which they had brought with them a Frenchwoman, whom they wished to set free, and to deliver to him in proof of their good intentions.

An hour or so after sunrise the deputation set forth, bearing, as in the case of the massacre at Fort Natchez, the pipe of peace. They were admitted to speak to the commander, as their number only amounted to four, and St. Denis listened politely to their communication. He knew the Indian character thoroughly, and though he listened as if he was convinced, he had his own private opinions.

The force at that time was very small. He had at his disposal only forty soldiers and twenty settlers; less than half

the number of his opponents, who were picked men of their tribe. Under such circumstances he deemed it prudent to keep the gates closed against so large an array of strangers, whatever their intentions really were. He answered the deputation that he would accede to the wish of their chief, provided they sent to him the Frenchwoman with an escort of only ten warriors. Upon this message being returned to Rattlesnake, he saw that he was foiled in all his attempts to get into the fort by strategy; he however sent a second time, refusing to deliver up the prisoner unless his warriors were admitted in a body. St. Denis then sent them word that he saw plainly from their large number, and from their refusal to comply with his demand, that they were traitors and liars, bent upon mischief; that he was disposed, however, to allow them to return quietly to their villages, provided they gave up to him the Frenchwoman, for whom he would pay a ransom.

Enraged by this answer, and seeing himself foiled at every turn by the invincible St. Denis, of whom all his enemies stood in awe, Rattlesnake ground his teeth in anger. His honor as a warrior was at stake. The enterprise had been committed to his hands, and his people waited for tidings of its success. He did not know what force St. Denis might have with him; but he knew that it would be impossible to attack the fort without he could assault it at some great advantage—either by getting within its walls, in the guise of friends, as he had first proposed, or by drawing the garrison outside, as he now hoped, by a devilish plan, to do.

His darkening eye, as it glanced about upon his moody group of warriors, fastened itself upon Marguerite, where she leaned against the tree to which she was bound. She was a sight to wake pity, even in an Indian breast, so pale, so worn, all the light gone from her eyes and the roses from her cheeks. Those eyes, sad, wild, shining with a feverish luster, were fixed nervously on the fort. She was thinking of Maurice. There was no pity in the heart of Rattlesnake as he gazed at her. He guessed that her thoughts were with her cousin, and he hated her because it was so. His passion for her was fierce and strong, as were all the passions of his nature—but not stronger than his warlike ambition, nor the baser impulse of revenge.

The cruel resolve he was forming glittered in his eye ; but she saw nothing, except that spot which had been the goal of her hopes so long. This frail French girl should be the instrument in his hands, either to tempt the garrison from their stronghold, or with which to wreak his revenge upon them. He forgot now the fingers which could sew sunbeams, and the corner in his cabin which he had longed to brighten with her presence ; he forgot the sweetness of her laugh and the mirthful light which had once danced over that now pale and melancholy face.

A few sentences passed rapidly between him and his band. They all approved of his resolution, which was to provoke the French by erecting a stake within sight of the fort, and binding their prisoner upon it, to make signs that they would burn her if they were not instantly treated with. Then, should they still fail to call out the garrison, the torch should really be applied to her funeral pyre.

"Love is sweet," muttered the chief, as he looked at his victim ; "but revenge is sweeter."

They were not long in driving into the ground a stake, in an open space, where the French could watch their every movement. Unbinding Marguerite, they led her to the place of horror. When she began to comprehend what was about to be done, she looked wildly at Rattlesnake, then lifted her eyes and hands to heaven.

"Better so," she murmured, as soon as the first shock was over, "than to have lived the wife of an Indian. But oh, if I could have seen Maurice before I die ! He will never know how I have loved him !"

They bound her to the stake, and she hung there patiently, scarcely heeding the appalling preparations as they heaped the brushwood near her, and gathered sticks ready for the torture. Her eyes were constantly bent upon the fort—her wish to obtain a sight of her lover, if ever so brief and far away.

In the mean time an intense excitement existed in the fort. The garrison could see the revenge which was threatened, and their lips turned pale, and they clutched their weapons with nervous hands. They could distinguish that the victim was a young and slender girl, and their manly courage would

not submit to be kept in abeyance, while she perished there in the midst of her savage foes, without an effort being made to save her. The men clustered about St. Denis, and begged to be allowed to sally out and attempt a rescue.

But he reasoned with them that the case was hopeless; that if there appeared to be any danger of her escape, her tormentors would immediately tomahawk her; while, without the satisfaction of saving her, they would lose their own lives and abandon the fort to destruction; and as in the fort were women and children as helpless as the poor girl they saw hanging there, it would only bring a similar fate upon them.

Among those who opposed this determination of his was his young aid-de-camp, who stood beside him. He was a fine-looking young man, with courage and candor written upon every feature. He could not submit—he was too fresh in all his impulses, too chivalrous and warm-hearted—to remain idle, when a woman implored his aid.

“I pray you, St. Denis, let me go, with such a company as will volunteer. You can close the gates after us, and if we all perish, why, it will not be said that we let a woman, and a countrywoman at that, die unavenged. Decide, my lord, before it is too late!”

“You are mad, Maurice, really mad! Your life is worth too much to me, for me to permit you to throw it away. Remember what is at stake! and remember the one, in *la belle France*, who waits and watches for your return. Would you widow her in her maidenhood?”

“Ah, my lord, it is the thought of her which makes me so true to her sex. Wers *she* where that poor creature hangs, would I not wish the man who saw her to forget himself in her defense?” and the young man, as he grew eloquent in his earnestness, raised himself higher on the parapet to scrutinize the gentle victim, surrounded by her savage foes. They were already forming for the dance of death, before applying the fatal torch.

While he gazed on the scene, so terribly fascinating, his cheek grew pale and his gaze fearfully eager.

“St. Denis,” he cried, suddenly turning, “lend me your glass.”

The commander handed to him the small spy-glass which he himself had been using; his aid looked through it a minute, and letting the instrument fall at his feet, he exclaimed, hoarsely, while a spasm of agony passed over his blanched countenance:

"My God, St. Denis, it is Marguerite!"

"Maurice, I verily believe you are going wild. Marguerite! and pray how came she here, with this band of hostile Indians, when you left her in Paris, safe in her own little room?"

"How do I know? Oh, God! I am afraid she has followed me, and fallen into their hands. I tell you *it is her!* Should I not know my own little cousin? Oh, I saw the necklace about her neck which I clasped there at parting. Come, men!"

"Stay!" cried St. Denis, grasping the arm of the young man, as he was about to leap to the ground beneath.

At that moment a cry rent the air—a woman's cry—not very loud, but clear and sharp; it uttered one word:

"Maurice!"

"She calls me," groaned the aid, wringing his arm from his superior's grasp; "did I not tell you? Come, you who are willing to risk your lives to save a woman who is dear to me!" And with these words he bounded over the parapet into the open field beneath.

The men had already grasped their weapons, and more than half of them impetuously followed Maurice, who had nothing with him but his sword. When the Indians saw this effect, which they had hoped for, they stopped singing the death-song and gave a yell of delight. They made a formidable appearance, thoroughly armed as they were, and made hideous by the shrieks and yells with which they prepared for the conflict, overmatching the French by four to one.

Now that the emergency had come, St. Denis was not the man to shrink from it. Prudence had dictated his course; but when he saw his young friend rushing into the unequal conflict, he hastily summoned every soldier in the fort who had not already leaped the parapets, and leaving the twenty settlers to defend the gates, he hurried forth to support Maurice.

There are emotions which seem to raise men into demi gods. Such impulses now nerved the arms and steadied the aim of every man who advanced to meet the whooping savages. As for their leader, he marched impatiently on, only his sword in his hand, but his eyes seemed to flame destroying glances, and his stature to increase with the mighty resolution within him. More than twenty shots were aimed particularly at him, as he ran over the intervening space, many feet in advance of his men; but not one injured him. The Indians gazed in wonder, thinking he must be some supernatural being, impervious to bullets. With such ardor, such inspired rage did the little band of French fall upon their powerful foes, that at the first charge, the loss of the latter was such as to make their numbers nearly equal with that of the whites.

Instead of rallying and rushing over the French, fighting their way into the fort, as had been their plan, the Natchez now began to fly to the woods, firing as they ran, and seeking covert wherever they could obtain it, from whence to load and fire again. In this manner the scene of the contest was soon in the rear of the stake to which Marguerite was tied.

When they first saw the French emerging from the fort, the Natchez had asked their leader if they should dispatch the girl, to which he had answered in the negative. Proudly confident of victory, he wished to preserve Laughing Eyes, to show her the scalp of her lover, and prove to her that there was no longer any use in her refusing to share his wigwam.

And now, before this stake, where Marguerite gazed at it with anguished looks, a desperate combat was taking place. The tide of battle had rolled away, leaving these two enemies stranded there. Maurice Cantarelle and Rattlesnake were locked in each other's embrace. We may well believe that it was not the embrace of love. The knife of the Indian had been wrested from him, and lay at Marguerite's feet, whither Maurice had flung it. If she could have stooped to pick it up and sever her bonds, to rush to the assistance of her lover would have been quick work with her, but she was too securely bound. The Frenchman's arms were clasped about the waist of the savage; his sword was

in his left hand, but he could not bring himself into a position to use it; while the right arm of the chief, who was much taller than he, was clasped closely about his throat with the intention of choking him to death.

Maurice did, indeed, begin to feel his own hold relax, and a sense of suffocation overpowering him, when a thought of his love, a glance at her pale face, awoke his reeling energies to a last mighty exertion, and with a blow of his left hand he wounded the Indian so severely across the back of his head and shoulder that the arm compressing his neck grew weak. Maurice improved the instant to break away from his uncomfortable position; and again began a struggle of strength and cunning to get possession of the sword, of which both now had a hold.

Marguerite, gazing on the scene with straining eyes, expected every moment when some warrior would return to the rescue of his chief. Rattlesnake was so much the more powerful in frame that her lover seemed a child in his hands; but Maurice's heart was fired with superhuman energy, and he clung to the sword which was now cutting his fingers to the bone. At this critical moment, the Frenchman, who was a scientific wrestler, suddenly tripped up his antagonist, who fell, dragging him down with him; but in falling, Rattlesnake lost his grasp upon the weapon, and the next instant Maurice had plunged it into his side. Blood spouted from the wound; and with a groan, the chief turned over on his face, in an apparently dying condition. The dark hue receded from his face, leaving it a sickly paleness. Marguerite shut her eyes to bar out the welcome and yet painful sight.

At this moment it was, that, cunning and revengeful even in death, Rattlesnake, the moment that the attention of his adversary was diverted from him, rolled over to the feet of Marguerite, regained his knife, raised himself, and in the act of striking at her heart sunk back insensible. Had his strength held out a second longer, his revenge would have been completed even in defeat. As it was, the point of the knife just drew a drop of blood to discolor still more that soiled, ill-fated wedding-dress.

In alarm Maurice rushed to her, and cut the thongs which bound her.

"Are you hurt, my Marguerite?"

"No, Maurice—happy, happy!"

She smiled, though her voice sunk to a whisper, and she could not bear her weight upon her feet. The kiss which he pressed upon her lips, in the midst of carnage and danger, was reward for the sufferings which led to it.

"We must not tarry, love," said the young officer, after this hasty embrace. "Ho! St. Denis, is that you? Call in the men. Thank God, my cousin is saved, and the leader of this attack is dead at our feet."

While he spoke, a shrill shriek rung from the adjoining woods, and the Indian girl who had hid herself from his vengeance, now rushed forward and threw herself upon the body of the chief whom she had loved so well. Her anger, pride, jealousy, vanished then, as if they had never been. With a heart-breaking moan she laid her face to that of Rattlesnake, and chafed his hands.

"Poor girl," murmured Marguerite; "can not you get her to come to the fort, Maurice? She has been kind to me."

But Little Bird refused to answer or stir from her place.

"It is dangerous for us to linger here," said Maurice; "the savages may rally at any moment. Come, men, to the fort. Our work is done."

With his light burden in his arms, he ran like a deer to the gate, where he was received with a shout of welcome from the men stationed on guard there. Soon St. Denis returned, bringing in his soldiers, flushed with victory, though, alas! more than one of them was brought in wounded, dying, or dead.

The Natchez did not again show themselves beyond the shelter of the wood. The death of their brave chief filled them with consternation; their losses amounted to more than half their number, and the rest were discouraged. They made a wretched retreat toward home; but a good many of them died of their wounds on the way, and of all that redoubtable band of one hundred and fifty picked warriors, but a few reached Natchez, bearers of a melancholy tale.

And for those who have an interest in learning how complete was the punishment of the Natchez for their attack

upon the fort, on the occasion of the massacre of St. Andrew's Eve, we will state that they were soon driven from the fort, which they had put in order and defended against the French, who were sent from New Orleans to recapture it. The miserable women and children who had so long been their captives were taken from them, and carried to New Orleans, where they were kindly received and attended by the Ursulines. The Natchez who were taken prisoners were sold as slaves to St. Domingo; and their race was soon nearly or utterly extinguished, thus fulfilling the prophecy of their sovereign, when he incited them to attempt the destruction of foreign invaders: "We have had ancestors, but we are destined to be the ancestors of no human beings."

CHAPTER X.

WITHIN THE FORT.

AND now a backward glance at some of the past scenes, and we will bring our story to a close. The escape which Marguerite had when Rattlesnake plunged his knife among the reeds of Little Bird's bed was very narrow; the blade ran down between her breast and arm, and the only injury it did was to slash the flowing sleeve of her dress.

She was obliged to remain concealed in that close, uncomfortable place during the weary days which intervened before the departure of the expedition to Natchitoches. Nearly every night Little Bird made some effort to assist her escape to the woods or river; she had a canoe concealed beneath some bushes on the shore, and constantly provided with parched corn and dried meat, in case any chance occurred for getting the white girl off without detection. Yet night after night passed without affording the wished-for opportunity, one reason for which was that the suspicions of Rattlesnake were such as to keep him lingering in the vicinity at unexpected hours.

The only chance which Marguerite had of change from her

irksome position was when the father and brothers of Little Bird were out after dark, when, with fear and trembling, the poor girl would creep out of her coffin-like hiding-place to exercise her limbs for a few moments.

The proposition of the Natchez to send an expedition against Natchitoches, which was immediately discovered and communicated to her by the prying Indian maiden, was the first thing which inspired Marguerite with a hope—a faint, vague hope—that this might open the way for her to not only escape from her present situation, but to reach Maurice. If she could follow in the wake of the band, perhaps she might not only gain a refuge at Natchitoches, but by giving warning of the hostile purposes of the Indians, she might be the means of saving the fort.

Little Bird approved of her plan, helping her heartily to carry it into execution; and without the Indian cunning and endurance of that person, Marguerite would have failed miserably.

When the lightning, which accompanied the storm the night of their departure on the river, threatened to betray the little canoe, following silently and at a distance the convoy of warriors, it was Tree-la-lu who bade the French girl to stand up in the front, while she, hidden behind her robes, vigorously plied the paddle. She relied upon the superstitious nature of the band to prevent their close examination into the mystery.

It was Little Bird who, fearing the return of Rattlesnake to investigate the affair, had taken such extraordinary precautions to cover the trail, at the time of his return to the shore of the river. Marguerite had stepped in her footsteps, until they came to a place where the trail was least discernible, when Little Bird had directed her to step aside and hide in a hollow tree until she came after her. The Indian then made her own tracks as conspicuous as possible, and sitting down alone, waited to find if she was discovered and followed.

It was not until then that she fully made up her mind to accompany the pale-face and see the drama played out. Her resolve to do so was eagerly welcomed by Marguerite, who felt her dependence upon her. It was to the Little Bird's wonderful watchfulness and subtlety—never permitting her

companion to be within sight of her, but giving her directions by which to follow the trail—that she owed her safe arrival in the proximity of Natchitoches.

It was in an attempt which the two then made to get Marguerite into the fort, that they were surprised by Rattlesnake.

At last, after this worst trial of her endurance, the young girl found herself actually safe within the fort, sheltered in the strong arms of her faithful and overjoyed cousin.

Her troubles were over now, except her sympathy for the grief of poor Little Bird, to whom she felt so grateful for her services. As soon as it was at all safe to venture so near the woods, a body of soldiers went out, at her request, to bring in the Indian girl, who could be seen still clinging to the corpse of her lover. But when the escort reached the spot, they found the maiden dead. She had pierced her heart with the same knife which had slain her chief, and sinking on his strong bosom, ~~which~~ had ever been cold to her, the passionate, unhappy Little Bird of the forest had perished. The bodies of the Indian lovers were buried in one grave, while the tears of Marguerite fell for the fate of her friend.

The presence of her lover, and the kind attentions of all in the fort, before long brought back the bloom to the cheek and the light to the eye of Marguerite. The women of the place took a great interest in renovating the torn and soiled white dress which had passed through such vicissitudes with its wearer. Being restored to bridal purity by their hands, and there being, fortunately for the wishes of the pair, a Catholic priest in the fort, it was not many days before the wedding-dress was worn under happier auspices, and the cannon and musketry of the far-away fort fired a joyful salute over the union of Maurice and Marguerite.

It is not to be expected that the young wife would be very fond of warlike adventures, after her experience; she persuaded her husband, as soon as practicable, to return to New Orleans, and begin the business of a merchant, in which he was prosperous, and their descendants are now among the aristocracy of the South.

Among the first things which occupied the attention of *Madame Cantarelle*, after she really found herself safely in New Orleans, was the fate of the little girl who had once

been an inmate of the same dwelling with herself, and whom Rattlesnake had adopted—the pretty little daughter of the unfortunate merchant. Out of respect for the memory of its dead parents, as well as affection for the child, she could not endure the thought of its remaining in the hands of the Natchez to be brought up an Indian in habits and feelings. She had learned that the white prisoners had been rescued, and that the most of them were now under the care and protection of the Ursulines. She was eager to visit these holy sisters for another reason; to render an account of herself to the good Marie, who had been a mother to her upon her first arrival in the country.

Very glad was Sister Marie to see again the young creature, who, in spite of frivolity and undue excess of laughter and love of finery, had won an abiding-place in her heart. Very glad and very much astonished; for she had heard from others of those unhappy women, of her seizure by Rattlesnake, and subsequent mysterious disappearance; and she had been half inclined, if the truth were told, to credit the version of the affair most popular with the Natchez, namely, that she had soared up to the sky in her white bridal robes.

For the good Ursuline knew that Marguerite, though gay and careless, had a true heart and a pure spirit; and she thought quite likely the merciful Savior, in his compassion for the debasement about to befall her, had performed a miracle in her behalf.

But since such a marvelous honor as this had not been accorded to her favorite, she was well content to welcome her back in the flesh and blood, safe and happy, the wife of the fine young gentleman who was presented to her as the Maurice for whom his brave little sweetheart had traveled so far.

“And you still have the Laughing Eyes!” said Sister Marie, holding her hands, and looking at her kindly.

“Oh, don’t call me by that name!” cried Marguerite, with a little shudder. “Do my eyes laugh still? They have shed enough tears to wash all the brightness out of them, since I saw you, good sister. But I am very happy now, and grateful for it;” and her glance rested softly upon her husband’s face.

"Ay, you should both be grateful. You should offer special thanks to God, for his favors, and offer a mite toward the comfort of those who did not escape from the furnace of affliction without deep scars."

"True," answered the young wife, while Maurice, taking the hint, opened his purse and dropped a couple of gold pieces in the palm of the Ursuline, "and we have come now to take and adopt one of the orphans, if I can find her—the little girl with whose mother I boarded at the time the affair took place. She was a sweet little thing, about a year old."

This description resulted in their finding the child, who had already become a pet in the hospital. The women said that Rattlesnake's mother had clung to it frantically, resolved not to part with the child to which her son had taken so strong a fancy; but she was compelled to resign it.

Maurice, although rather dubious about assuming the responsibilities of a father thus early, thought his wife looked very pretty weeping over the little creature, kissing and caressing it. At her entreaty, he arranged to support and educate the orphan, and was permitted to take it away.

In after years, when she had children of her own, Marguerite always treated with equal fondness the eldest of the group, who had been adopted into her affections at a time when her heart was overrunning with love and gratitude. Little Marie grew up a child of unusual beauty, and it was not so very long before she was old enough to have a romance of her own, which, perhaps, we shall some time relate.

In the mean time, the Cantarelles were always firm friends of the Ursulines, to whom they gave many acceptable gifts. The society flourished, until, from the humble beginning which it made in the charity hospital, it has grown to be one of the wealthiest religious corporations in the State.

After Maurice's speculations had turned out profitably, himself and wife went back to Paris to visit the old, beloved scenes of their childhood; but things had changed there, too, and they were content to settle finally in the growing and, soon to be great, metropolis of the South.

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